



Frontispiece to the Prodigal Son. D. Latton Sculp.

THE
WORKS
OF
M. DE VOLTAIRE.

Translated from the FRENCH.

WITH
NOTES, HISTORICAL, CRITICAL,
AND EXPLANATORY.

By T. FRANKLIN, D.D.
Chaplain to his Majesty, and late Greek Professor in
the University of Cambridge.

T. SMOLLETT, M.D.
AND OTHERS.

A NEW EDITION.

VOLUME XXVII.

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This volume contains
A Letter to the Most Excellent the
Duchess of Maine,

THE

PROSE WORKS

OF

Mr. DE VOLTAIRE

VOL. III.

This VOLUME contains

**A LETTER to her Most Serene Highness the
DUCHESS of MAINE.**

ORESTES. A Tragedy.

PREFACE to the PRODIGAL, a Comedy.

The PRODIGAL. A Comedy.

**A LETTER from the Jesuit TOURNEMINE to
Father BRUMOV, on the Tragedy of ME-
ROPE.**

**A LETTER to the Marquis SCIPIO MAFFEI,
Author of the *Italian* MEROPE, and many
other celebrated Performances.**

**A LETTER from Mr. de la LINDELLE, to Mr.
de VOLTAIRE.**

**The ANSWER of Mr. de VOLTAIRE to Mr.
de la LINDELLE.**

A
L E T T E R
T O
Her Most Serene HIGHNESS
T H E
D U C H E S S O F M A I N E.

MADAM,

YOU have seen that noble age, which is at once the model and the reproach of the present, and will be so of future generations, and have yourself made a part of its glory, by your taste, and by your example: those illustrious times, when your ancestors, the *Condés*, crowned with laurels, cultivated the polite arts; when a *Bossuet* immortalized heroes, and instructed kings; when a *Fenelon*, the second of mankind in eloquence, and the first in the art of making virtue amiable, taught justice and humanity in the most charming manner; when

Racine and *Boileau* presided over the *Belles Lettres*, *Lully* over music, and *le Brun* over painting; all these arts, Madam, met together in your palace: there I had first the happiness, a circumstance which I shall never forget, of hearing, though I was then but a child, that excellent scholar, whose profound learning never obscured the brightness of his genius, cultivating the fine understanding of the *Duke of Bourgogne*, the *Duke of Maine*, and yourself: that happy labour, in which he was so powerfully assisted by nature. Sometimes he would take up a *Sophocles* or *Euripides* before you, and translate off-hand one of their tragedies. The admiration and enthusiasm that possessed his soul, on reading those noble performances, inspired him with expressions that answered the manly and harmonious energy of the *Greek*, as nearly as it was possible to reach it in the prose of a language just emerging from barbarism, and which, polished as it now is by so many fine authors, is still, notwithstanding, very deficient in point of force, copiousness, and precision. It is impossible to convey through any modern language all the power of *Greek* expressions; they describe with one stroke, what costs us a whole sentence. A single word was sufficient for them

to

to express a mountain covered over with trees, bending beneath the weight of their leaves ; or a god throwing his darts at a vast distance ; or, the tops of rocks struck with repeated thunderbolts. That language had not only the advantage of filling the imagination with a word, but every word, we know, had its peculiar melody, which charmed the ear at the same time that it displayed the finest pictures to the mind ; and all *our* translations for this reason from the *Greek* poets are weak, dry, and poor : it is imitating palaces of porphyry with bricks and pebbles. Mr. *de Malefieu* notwithstanding, by the efforts of a sudden enthusiasm, and a vehement forcible manner of reciting, seemed to make up for the poverty of our language, and infuse into his declamation the very soul and spirit of the great Athenians. Permit me, Madam, to give you his thoughts with regard to this inventive, ingenious, and sensible people, a people from whom the Romans, their conquerors, learned every thing, and who, a long time after the fall of both their empires, had yet the power to raise modern Europe from ignorance and barbarism.

He knew more of Athens than many of our travellers in these days do of Rome, after they have seen it over and over. That vast quantity

of statues, by the greatest masters; those pillars which adorned the public market-places; those monuments of taste and grandeur; that superb and immense theatre, built in the finest situation, between the town and the citadel, where the works of *Sophocles* and *Euripides* were heard by *Pericles* and *Socrates*; and the youth of Athens attended, not standing up, or in perpetual riot and confusion, as they do with us: in a word, every thing which the Athenians had done in every art and every branch of knowledge, was ever present to the mind of Mr. *de Maleseu*. He was far from falling in with the opinions of those ridiculously rigid critics, and false politicians, who blame the Athenians for having been too sumptuous in their public entertainments, and do not know that this very magnificence greatly enriched Athens, by attracting crouds of foreigners, who came from all parts to admire, and to receive lessons from them on eloquence and virtue.

This extensive and almost universal genius was engaged by you, Madam, to translate the *Iphigenia in Tauris* of *Euripides*; a task which he executed with equal elegance, strength, and fidelity. It was represented at an entertainment which he had the honour to present to your Highness, an entertainment worthy of him who gave,
and

and of her who received it. You, I remember, Madam, played the part of *Iphigenia*, for I was present at the representation ; and as at that time I had no acquaintance with the French stage, it never entered into my head that gallantry could ever have been mingled with so tragical a subject. I gave myself up to the manners and customs of Greece, perhaps the more easily, because I was then acquainted with no other. I admired the *antique* in all its noble simplicity ; it was this which first suggested to me the idea of writing my tragedy of *Oedipus*, without ever having read *Corneille's*. I begun, as an essay of my abilities, by translating that famous scene from *Sophocles*, of the double confidence of *Jocasta* and *Oedipus*. I read it to some of my friends who frequented the theatre, and to two or three actors : they assured me it would never succeed on the French stage, and advised me to read *Corneille*, who had carefully avoided that part of the plot ; and all agreed, that if I did not follow his example, by putting in a love intrigue, the players would never undertake it. I then read the *Oedipus* of *Corneille*, which, though it was not ranked with *Cinna* and *Polyeucte*, had, notwithstanding, met with some applause. I must confess, their opinions ran directly counter to mine, from the beginning of this affair to the

end ; but I was forced to submit to example, and the evil power of fashion. In the midst of all the terror of this master-piece of antiquity, I brought in, not absolutely a love intrigue, but the * remembrance of an extinguished passion, which appeared to the last degree absurd ; but I will not repeat here what I have already said on this subject.

Your Highness may remember, I had the honour of reading my *Oedipus* to you ; the scene from *Sophocles* was not condemned at that tribunal ; for both yourself, the Cardinal *de Polignac*, Mr. *de Malefieu*, and your whole court, unanimously condemned me, and with great reason, for having so much as mentioned the word love in a work which *Sophocles* had finished so completely, and so successfully, without that unhappy foreign ornament ; and yet the very fault which you blamed me for, was the only thing that recomanded my performance to the stage. The players were, with the greatest difficulty, prevailed on to perform my *Oedipus*, which they imagined could never succeed : the public, however, were entirely of your opinion ; every part of it that was written in the taste of *Sophocles* was generally applauded, and the love

* Voltaire here alludes to the part of *Philoctetes* in his *Oedipus*. See the play, and the preface to it, in the first Vol. of the Dramatic works.

scenes condemned by the most judicious critics : to say the truth, Madam, whilst parricide and incest are destroying a family, and a plague laying the whole country waste, is it a season for love and gallantry ? There cannot, perhaps, be two more striking proofs of theatrical absurdity, and the power of habit, than the *Corneille* on one side making *Theseus* cry out,

* Quelque ravage affreux qu'etale ici la peste,
L'absence aux vrais amans est encor plus funeste.

And on the other myself, sixty years after him, making old *Jocasta* talk of her old love ; and all this only in compliance with a taste the most false and ridiculous that ever corrupted literature.

That a *Phædra*, whose character is, perhaps, the most truly theatrical that ever was exhibited, and almost the only person whom antiquity hath represented in love, that she should express all the power and fury of that fatal passion ; that a *Roxana*, confined within the walls of an idle se-raglio, should abandon herself to love and jealousy ; that *Ariadne* should complain to heaven

* The literal translation of which is " whatever dreadful havoc and plague may make here, absence to those who truly love is much more dreadful." There is a great deal of such nonsense in Dryden's and some other of our tragedies, but it would not go down in the present age.

and earth of cruelty and inconstancy ; that *Orosmanes* should destroy a mistress whom he adored ; all this is truly tragic : love, either raging, or criminal, or unhappy, or attended with remorse, draws such tears from us as we need not blush to shed ; but there is no medium : love should either command as a tyrant, or not appear at all ; he can never act an under-part : but that *Nero* should hide himself behind the tapestry to overhear the conversation of his mistress and his rival ; that old *Mithridates* should make use of a comedy trick to discover the secret of a young woman beloved by his two sons ; that *Maximus*, even in *Cinna*, a piece of so much real merit, should act the part of a villain, and discover so important a conspiracy, only because he was weak enough to be in love with a woman, whose passion for *Cinna* he must have known, and alledge by way of reason, that

* Love excuses all,

For the true lover knows no friends——

that old *Sertorius* should fall in love with a strange Spanish lady, called *Viriate*, and be assassinated by his rival *Perpenna* ; all this, we will be bold

* The Original is,

“ l'amour rend tout permis,

“ Un veritable amant ne connoit point d'amis.”

enough

enough to assert, is little, mean, and puerile: such ridiculous stuff would degrade us infinitely below the Athenians, if our great masters had not made amends for these faults, which are merely national, by those sublime beauties which are entirely the product of their own genius.

It is indeed astonishing to me, that the great tragic poets of Athens should dwell so much on those subjects where nature displays every thing that is great and affecting; an *Electra*, an *Iphigenia*, a *Merope*, an *Alcmeon*: and that our illustrious moderns, neglecting all these, should scarce treat of any thing but love, which is generally much more proper for comedy than tragedy: sometimes indeed they have endeavoured to enrich and adorn it by politics; but that love which is not violent is always cold; and all political intrigues that do not rise to the height and fury of ambition, are still more cold and insipid: political reasonings and debates are very agreeable in *Polybius* or *Machiavel*; gallantry is very fit for tales or comedies; but nothing like this is suitable to the grandeur and pathos of true tragedy.

A taste for gallantry in our tragedies was carried to such a ridiculous excess, that a great princess, whose high rank and fine understand-

ing might in some measure excuse her believing that all the world would be of her opinion, imagined, that the parting of *Titus* and *Berenice* was an excellent subject for a tragedy : she therefore put it into the hands of two of our best writers * ; neither of them had ever produced a performance wherein love had not played the principal or at least the second part ; but one of them had never touched the heart, except in those scenes of the *Cid* which he had taken from the Spanish : the other, always tender and elegant, endowed with every species of eloquence, and above all, master of that enchanting art which draws forth the most delicate sentiments from the least and most unpromising incidents : one therefore made of *Titus* and *Berenice* as contemptible a piece as ever appeared on the stage ; the other found out the secret of interesting the spectator for five acts without any other foundation but these words, *I love you, and I leave you*. It was indeed nothing more than a pastoral, between an emperor, a king, and a queen ; and a pastoral withal infinitely less tragical than the interesting scenes of

* The French expression is "deux maîtres de la scene, i. e. "two masters of the scene." Corneille and Racine, the latter of whom Voltaire takes every occasion of preferring to the former, though he frequently censures both with great freedom, and generally with equal justice.

Pastor Fido. The success of this, however, persuaded the public, and the poets, that love, and love alone, was the soul of tragedy.

It was not till long after, when he was farther advanced in life, that this great poet found out that he was capable of something superior to this: when he was sorry he had enervated the drama by so many declarations of love, and sentiments of jealousy, and coquetry, much worthier, as I have already ventured to assert, of Menander, than of Sophocles and Euripides. Then he wrote his master-piece, *Athaliah*: but though he was undeceived himself, the public was *not*: they could not bring themselves to conceive, that a woman, a child, and a priest, could make an interesting tragedy: a work that approached nearer to perfection than any which ever came from the hand of man, remained for a long time in contempt, and its illustrious author had to his last hour the mortification of seeing the age he lived in, though greatly improved, still so corrupted with bad taste, as never to do justice to his noblest performance.

It is certain, if this great man had lived, and cultivated those talents which alone made his fortune and his fame, and which therefore he should not have deserted, he would have restored to the

theatre its ancient purity, and no more have degraded the great subjects of antiquity with love intrigue. He had begun an *Iphigenia in Tauris*, and there was not a word of gallantry in his whole plan: he would never have made *Agamemnon*, *Orestes*, *Electra*, *Telephus*, or *Ajax*, in love: but having unhappily quitted the stage before he had reformed it, all those who followed him imitated, and even added to his faults, without copying any of his beauties. The morality of *Quinault's* operas was brought into almost every tragic scene: sometimes it is in *Alcibiades* who assures us, that *in those tender moments he has always proved by experience, that a mortal may taste of perfect happiness*: sometimes it is an *Amestris*, who tells us, that the daughter of a great king burns with a secret flame without shame, and without fear: in another, *Agonis* follows the steps of the fair *Crisis* in every place, the constant adorer of her divine charms; the fierce *Arminius*, the defender of Germany, protests to us, that *he comes to read his fate in the eyes of Ismenia*; and goes to the camp of *Varus*, to see if—the fair eyes of his *Ismenia* will shew him their wonted tenderness.—In *Amasis*, which is only *Merope*, crowded with a heap of romantic episodes, the heroine, who, three days before, at a country-house, had just got sight of
 a young

a young stranger, and fallen in love with him, cries out, with a great deal of regard to decency and decorum,—*This is the same stranger, alas! he hath not conceal'd himself so much as he ought, for my repose: for the few moments when he chanced to strike my eyes I saw him and blushed, my soul was deeply moved at him*—In *Athenais*, a prince of Persia disguises himself, in order to make his mistress a visit at the court of a Roman emperor: we fancy, in short, that we are reading the romances of *Mademoiselle Scuderi*, who described the citizens of Paris under the names of the heroes of antiquity.

To confirm and establish this horrid taste amongst us, which renders us so ridiculous in the eyes of all sensible foreigners, it unfortunately happened, that *Mr. de Longepierre*, a warm admirer of antiquity, but not sufficiently acquainted with our stage, and who besides was careless in his versification, gave us his *Electra*. We must confess it was written in the taste of the ancients; no cold ill-placed intrigue disfigured this subject full of terror: the piece was simple, and without any episode. This procured for it, and with great reason, the patronage of so many persons of the first consideration, who flattered themselves that this valuable simplicity, which constituted the principal me-
rit

fit of the great geniusses of Athens, would be well received at Paris, where it had been so long neglected. You, Madam, with the late princeſs of *Conti*, were at the head of thoſe ſanguine friends; but, unhappily, the faults of the French piece were ſo numerous, in compariſon with the beauties which he had borrowed from the *Greek*, that you yourſelf acknowleged, at the representation, it was a ſtatue of *Praxiteles* diſfigured by a modern artiſt. You had reſolution enough to give up a thing which was not in reality worthy of being ſupported, well knowing, that favour and protection thrown away on bad performances, is as prejudicial to the advancement of wit and good ſenſe, as the unjuſt cenſure of real merit; but the downfal of *Eleëtra* was a terrible ſtroke on the partiſans of antiquity. The critics availed themſelves of the faults of the copy, the better to decry the merit of the original; and to complete the corruption of our taſte, we perſuaded ourſelves it was impoſſible to ſupport, without love and romance, thoſe ſubjects which the Greeks had never debaſed by ſuch episodes: it was pretended that we might admire the Greek tragedians in the reading, but that it was impoſſible to imitate them without being condemned by your own age and nation: ſtrange contradiction! for, ſurely, if the reading really
pleaſed

pleased us, how could the representation displease?

We should not, I acknowledge, endeavour to imitate what is weak and defective in the ancients : it is most probable that their faults were very well known to their contemporaries. I am satisfied, Madam, that the wits of Athens condemned, as well as you, some of those repetitions, and some declamations with which *Sophocles* has loaded his *Electra* : they must have observed that he had not dived deep enough into the human heart. I will moreover fairly confess, that there are beauties peculiar not only to the Greek language, but to the climate, to manners and times, which it would be ridiculous to transplant hither. I have not copied exactly therefore the *Electra* of *Sophocles*, much more I knew would be necessary ; but I have taken, as well as I could, all the spirit and substance of it. The feast celebrated by *Ægisthus* and *Clytemnæstra*, which they called the feast of *Agamemnon* ; the arrival of *Orestes* and *Pylades* ; the urn which was supposed to contain the ashes of *Orestes* ; the ring of *Agamemnon* ; the character of *Electra*, and that of *Iphisa*, which is exactly the *Chrysothemis* of *Sophocles* ; and, above all, the remorse of *Clytemnæstra* ; these I have copied from the Greek tragedy. When the messenger,

messenger, who relates the fictitious story of the death of *Orestes*, says to *Clytemnæstra*, “ I see, “ *Madam, you are deeply affected at his death ;*” she replies, “ *I am a mother, and must therefore “ be unhappy ; a mother, though injured, cannot “ hate her own offspring :*” she even endeavours to justify herself to *Electra*, with regard to the murder of *Agamemnon*, and laments her daughter. *Euripides* has carried *Clytemnæstra*’s repentance still farther. This, *Madam*, was what gained the applause of the most judicious and sensible people upon earth, and was approved by all good judges in our own nation. No character, in reality, can be more natural than that of a woman, criminal with regard to her husband, yet softened by her children ; a woman, whose proud and fiery disposition is still open to pity and compassion, who resumes the fierceness of her character on receiving too severe reproaches, and at last sinks into submission and tears. The seeds of this character were in *Sophocles* and *Euripides*, and I have only unfolded them. Nothing but ignorance, and its natural attendant, presumption, can assert, that the ancients have nothing worthy of our imitation : there is scarce one real and essential beauty and perfection, for the foundation of which, at least, we are not indebted to them.

I have

I have taken particular care not to depart from that simplicity so strongly recommended by the Greeks, and so difficult to attain, the true mark of genius and invention; and the very essence of all theatrical merit. A foreign character, brought into *Oedipus* or *Electra*, who should play a principal part, and draw aside the attention of the audience, would be a monster in the eyes of all those who have any knowledge of the ancients, or of that nature which they have so finely painted. Art and genius consist in finding every thing within the subject, and never going out of it in search of additional ornaments: but how are we to imitate that truly tragic pomp and magnificence which we find in the verses of Sophocles, that natural elegance and purity of distinction, without which the piece, how well soever conducted in other respects, must after all be but a poor performance!

I have at least given my countrymen some idea of a tragedy without love, without confidants, and without episodes: the few partisans of good taste acknowledge themselves obliged to me for it, though the rest of the world withhold their approbation for a time, but will come in at last, when the rage of party is over, the injustice of persecution at an end, and the clouds of ignorance dissipated. You, Madam, must
 preserve

preserve amongst us those glittering sparks of light which the ancients have transmitted to us; we owe every thing to them: not an art was born amongst us; every thing was transplanted: but the earth that bears these foreign fruits is worn out, and our ancient barbarism, by the help of false taste, would break out again in spite of all our culture and improvement: and the disciples of Athens and Rome become Goths and Vandals, corrupted with the manners of the Sibarites, without the kind favour and protection of persons of your rank. When nature hath given them either genius, or the love of genius, they encourage this nation, which is better able to imitate than to invent; and which always looks up towards the great for those instructions and examples which it perpetually stands in need of. All that I wish for, Madam, is, that some genius may be found to finish what I have but just sketched out; to free the stage from that effeminacy and affectation which it is now sunk into; to render it respectable to the gravest characters; worthy of the few great master-pieces which we already have amongst us; worthy, in short, the approbation of a mind like your's, and all those who may hereafter endeavour to assemble you.



O R E S T E S.

A

T R A G E D Y.

Represented in 1750.



DRAMATIS PERSONÆ.

ORESTES, Son of Agamemnon and Clytem-
næstra.

ELECTRA, } Sisters of Orestes.
IPHISA, }

CLYTEMNÆSTRA, Wife of Ægisthus.

PYLADES, Friend of Orestes.

PAMMENES, an old Man, attached to the Fa-
mily of Agamemnon.

DIMAS, an Officer of the Guards.

ATTENDANTS.

SCENE, the sea-shore, a wood, a temple, a
palace, and a tomb, on one side : the other,
Argos at a distance.

ORESTES.

O R E S T E S.

A

T R A G E D Y.

ACT I. SCENE I

IPHISA, PAMMENES.

IPHISA.

Say'st thou, Pammenes? shall these hated
walls,

Where I so long have dragg'd a life of woe,
Afford at least the melancholy comfort
Of mingling sorrows with my dear Electra?
And will Ægisthus bring her to the tomb
Of Agamemnon, bring his daughter here,
To be a witness of the horrid pomp,
The sad solemnity, which on this day
Annual returns, to celebrate their crimes,
And make their guilt immortal?

P A M.

P A M M E N E S.

O Iphisa,

Thou honour'd daughter of my royal master,
 Like thee, confin'd within these lonely walls,
 The secrets of a vile abandon'd court
 Do seldom reach Pammenes; but, 'tis rumour'd,
 The jealous tyrant brings Elestra here,
 Fearful lest Argos, by her cries alarm'd,
 Should rise to vengeance; ev'ry heart, he knows,
 Feels for the injur'd princess, therefore much
 He dreads the clamours; with a watchful eye
 Observes her conduct, treats her as a slave,
 And leads the captive to adorn his triumph.

I P H I S A.

Good heav'n! and must Elestra be a slave?
 Shall Agamemnon's blood be thus disgrac'd
 By a barbarian? Will her cruel mother,
 Will Clytemnæstra bear the vile reproach
 That on herself recoils, and all her race?
 Perhaps my sister is too fierce of soul,
 She mingles too much pride and bitterness
 Of keen resentment with her griefs; alas!
 Weak are her arms against a tyrant's pow'r:
 What will her anger, what her pride avail her?
 They only irritate a haughty foe,

And

And cannot serve our cause: my fate at least
Is milder, and this solitary state
Shields me from the wrongs which must oppress Electra.

Far from my father's foes, these pious hands
Can pay due offerings to his honour'd shade:
Far from his murth'rer in this sad retreat
Freely I weep in peace, and curse Ægisthus:
I'm not condemn'd to see the tyrant here,
Save when the sun unwillingly brings round
The fatal day that knit the dreadful tie,
When that inhuman monster shed the blood
Of Agamemnon, when base Clytemnæstra—

S C E N E II.

ELECTRA, IPHISA, PAMMENES.

IPHISA.

O my Electra! art thou here? my sister—

ELECTRA.

The day of horror is return'd, Iphisa:
The dreadful rites, the guilty feast prepar'd,
Have brought me hither; thy Electra comes,
Thy captive sister, comes a wretched slave,
To bear the tidings of their guilty joy.

IPHISA.

IPHISA.

To see Electra is a blessing still,
 It pours some joy into their bitter cup
 Of sorrow, thus to mix my tears with thine.

ELECTRA.

Tears, my Iphisa! I have shed enough
 Of them already: O thou bleeding ghost
 Of my dead father, ever-honour'd shade,
 Is that the tribute which I owe to thee?
 I owe thee blood, and blood thou hast requir'd:
 Amidst the pomp of this dire festival,
 Dragg'd by Ægisthus here, I will collect
 My scatter'd spirits, shake off these vile chains,
 And be my own avenger: yes, Iphisa,
 This feeble arm shall reach the tyrant's heart:
 Did not the cruel Clytemnæstra shed
 A husband's blood? did I not see her lift
 Her barb'rous hand against him, and shall we
 Suspend the blow, and let the murth'rer live?
 O vengeance, and thou, animating virtue,
 That dost inspire me, art thou not as bold
 As daring guilt? We must, revenge ourselves,
 We must, Iphisa: fear'st thou then to strike,
 Fear'st thou to die! shall Clytemnæstra's daughter,

Thy

The blood of Atreus fear? O rather lend
Thy aid, and join the desperate Electra.

I P H I S A.

My dearest sister, moderate thy rage,
And calm thy troubled mind: against our foes
What can we bring but unavailing tears?
Who will assist us? who will lend us arms?
Or how shall we surprise a watchful king,
For guilt is ever fearful, by his guards
Surrounded? why, Electra, wilt thou court
Perpetual danger? shou'd the tyrant hear
Thy loud complaints, I tremble for thy life.

E L E C T R A.

Why let him hear them: I wou'd have my grief
Sink to his heart, and poison all his joys:
Yes; I wou'd have my cries ascend to heav'n,
And bring the thunder down; wou'd have them
raise

A hundred kings, who never yet have dar'd,
Unworthy cowards as they are, t'avenge
Great Agamemnon: but I pardon thee,
And the vain terrors of thy fearful soul,
That shrinks at danger; for he favours you,
I know he does, and only crushes me
Beneath his iron yoke: thou hast not been,

Like me, a wretched persecuted slave;
 Thou did'st not see the impious parricide,
 The horrid † feast, the dire solemnity,
 When Clytemnæstra—O the dreadful image
 Is still before me, in this place, Iphisa,
 Where now thou tremblest to declare thy
 wrongs,

There did these eyes behold our hapless father
 Caught in the deadly snare: Pammenes heard
 His dying groans, and ran with me to save him:
 But when I came, what did I see! my mother
 Plunging her ruthless dagger in his breast,
 To rob him of the poor remains of life.

[Turning to Pammenes.

Thou saw'st me take Orestes in my arms,
 My dear Orestes; little knew he then
 Of danger, but as near his murder'd father
 He stood, call'd out for aid to Clytemnæstra:
 She, amidst the horrors of the guilty scene,
 Stopp'd for a moment short, and gave us time
 Safe to convey the victim from Ægisthus.

† Nothing could add more to the horror of the crime than such a circumstance. Clytemnæstra, not content with murdering her husband, instituted a solemn feast in commemoration of the happy event, and called it, with cruel raillery, the supper of Agamemnon. Dinias, in his history of Argos, informs us, it was on the 13th of the month Gamelion, which answers to the beginning of our January.

Whether

O R E S T E S. 29

Whether the tyrant has completed yet
 Th' imperfect vengeance in Orestes' blood,
 I know not : O my brother, dost thou live,
 Or hast thou follow'd thy unhappy father ?
 Alas ! I weep for him, and fear for thee.
 These hands are loaded with inglorious chains,
 And these sad eyes, for ever bath'd in tears,
 See nought but guilt, oppression, and despair.

P A M M E N E S.

Ye dear remains of Atreus' honour'd race,
 Whose splendor I have seen, whose woes I feel,
 Permit a friend to fill your weeping souls
 With chearful hope, that ever waits propitious
 To sooth affliction : call to mind what heav'n
 Long since hath promis'd, that its vengeful
 hand
 Shou'd one day lead Orestes to the place
 Where we preserv'd him ; that Ægisthus there,
 Ev'n at yon tomb, and on the fatal day
 Mark'd for his impious triumph o'er the dead,
 Shou'd pay the forfeit of his crime : the Gods
 Can ne'er deceive ; in darkness still they veil
 Their secret purpose from the eyes of men,
 And punishment with slow but certain steps,
 Still follows guilt.

IPHISA.

But wherefore stays so long
 Their tardy vengeance? I have languish'd here
 In grief and anguish many a tedious hour;
 Electra, still more wretched, is in chains:
 Mean time the proud oppressor lives in peace,
 And glories in his crimes,

ELECTRA.

Thou seest, Pammenes,
 Ægisthus still renews his cruel triumph,
 And celebrates the fatal nuptials; still
 A wretched exile lives my dear Orestes,
 Forgetful of his father, and Electra,

PAMMENES.

But mark the course of time: he touches now
 The age when manly strength, with courage
 join'd,
 May aid your purpose; hope for his return,
 And trust on heav'n.

ELECTRA.

We will: thou son of wisdom,
 Thou good old man, O thou hast darted forth
 A ray of hope on my despairing soul.
 If with un pitying eye the gods beheld
 Our mis'ries here, and proud oppression, still
 Unpunish'd,

Unpunish'd, trampled on the tender feet
Of innocence, what hand wou'd crown their al-
tars

With incense and oblation ! but kind heav'n
Will give Orestes to a sister's tears,
And blast the tyrant : hear my voice, Orestes,
O hear thy country's, hear the cries of blood,
That call thee forth ; come from thy dreary caves,
And pathless desarts, where misfortune long
Hath try'd thy courage ; leave thy savage prey,
And all the roaming monsters of the forest,
To chase the beasts of Argos, to destroy
The tyrants of the earth, the murderers
Of kings ; O haste, and let me guide thy hand
Ev'n to the traitor's breast.

IPHISA.

No more : represe
Thy griefs, Electra, see thy mother comes.

ELECTRA.

And have I yet a mother ?

S C E N E III.

CLYTEMNÆSTRA, ELECTRA, IPHISA.

CLYTEMNÆSTRA.

Hence, and leave me ;
You may retire, Pammenes ; stay my daughters.

O R E S T E S.

IPHISA.

Alas ! that sacred name dispels my fears.

ELECTRA.

And doubles mine.

CLYTEMNÆSTRA.

Touching your fate, my children,
 I come to lay a mother's heart before you.
 Barren, thank heav'n, hath been my second bed,
 Nor brought a race of jealous foes to sow
 Division here. Alas ! my little race
 Is almost run ; the secret grief that long
 Hath prey'd on my sad heart will finish soon
 A life of woe : spite of Ægisthus, still
 I love my children, spite of all his rage,
 Electra, thou who in thy infant years
 So oft has giv'n me comfort, when the loss
 Of Iphigenia, and her cruel father
 Oppress'd my soul ; tho' now thy pride disdains
 me,
 And braves my pow'r, thou art my daughter still ;
 Unworthy as thou art, there's still a place
 In Clytemnæstra's heart for her Electra.

ELECTRA.

For me ! O heav'n, and am I yet belov'd ;
 And dost thou feel for thy unhappy daughter ?

O,

O, if thou dost, behold her chains, behold
Yon tomb—

CLYTEMNÆSTRA.

Unkind Electra, thus to wake
The sad remembrance! thou hast plung'd a
dagger
Into thy mother's breast: but I deserve it.

ELECTRA.

Thou hast disarm'd Electra, nature pleads
A mother's cause; I own myself to blame
For all the bitterness of sorrow pour'd
In dreadful execrations on thy head,
By thee deliver'd to the tyrant's pow'r,
I wou'd have torn thee from him; I lament,
But cannot hate thee. O, if gracious heav'n
Hath touch'd thy soul with wholesome penitence,
Obey its sacred will, and hear the voice
Of conscience, that commands thee to unloose
The horried ties that bind thee to a wretch
Despis'd and hated; follow the great God
Who leads thy footsteps to the paths of virtue;
Call back your son, let him return to fill
The throne of his great ancestors, to scourge
A tyrant, to revenge his murder'd father,
His sisters, and his mother: haste and send
For my Orestes.

CLYTEMNÆSTRA.

Talk no more of that,
 Electra, nor speak thus of my Ægisthus;
 I grieve to see thee in these shameful bonds;
 But know, a sov'reign cannot tamely brook
 Repeated insults, or embrace a foe:
 You had provok'd him to be cruel; I,
 Who am but his first subject, oft have try'd
 To sooth his anger, but in vain; my words,
 Instead of healing, but inflam'd the wound:
 Electra is indebted to herself
 For all her deep-felt inj'ries; henceforth bend
 To thy condition; let thy sister teach thee
 That we must yield submissive to our fate,
 If e'er we hope to change it. I cou'd wish
 To end my days in peace amongst my children;
 But if thy rapid and imprudent zeal
 Should bring Orestes here before the time,
 His life might answer for it, and thy own,
 If the king see him: though I pity thee,
 Electra, yet I owe a husband more
 Than a lost son, whom I have cause to fear.

ELECTRA.

O heav'n, that monster! he thy husband, he!
 And is it thus thou pity'st me? alas,

What

What will this poor, this light remorse avail thee,
 This fleeting sorrow, was thy tenderness
 But for a moment, dost thou threaten me,

[To Iphisa.

Is this, Iphisa, this a mother's love?

[To Clytemnestra.

It seems you threaten my Orestes too;
 You have no cause to fear, nor I to hope
 For him: alas! perhaps he is no more:
 Perhaps, Ægisthus, the detested tyrant,
 He whom but now thou didst not blush to call
 Thy husband, hath in secret ta'en his life.

I P H I S A.

Believe me, Madam, when I call the gods
 To witness, poor Electra and myself
 Are strangers to the fate of dear Orestes;
 Have pity then on your afflicted daughters,
 Pity your hapless son, and spare Electra,
 She has been wrong'd; her tears and her reproaches
 Suit well her fate, and ought to be forgiv'n.

E L E C T R A.

I must not hope it, must not ev'n complain;
 And if Orestes lives but in my thoughts
 'Tis deem'd a crime. I know Ægisthus well,
 Know his fierce nature; if he fears my brother,
 He'll soon destroy him.

CLYTEMNÆSTRA.

Know, thy brother lives ;
 If he's in danger, 'tis from thy imprudence ;
 Therefore be humble, moderate thy transports,
 Respect thy mother : think'st thou I come here,
 Elate with joy, to lead the splendid triumph ?
 O no, to me it is a day of sorrow ;
 Thou weep'st in chains, and I upon a throne.
 I know the cruel vows thy hatred made
 Against me : O Electra ! cease thy pray'rs,
 The gods have heard thee but two well already :
 Retire, and leave me.

S C E N E IV.

CLYTEMNÆSTRA alone.

How it shocks my soul
 To see my children ! O the guilty bed !
 My fatal marriage, and long prosp'rous crimes,
 Adultery and murder, horrid bonds !
 How ye torment me now ! my little dream
 Of happiness is o'er, and conscious darts
 Its sudden rays on my affrighted soul.
 How can Ægisthus live so long in peace !
 Fearless he leads me on to share with him
 These cruel triumphs ; but my spirits fail,

My

My strength forsakes me, and I tremble now
 At ev'ry omen, fear my subjects, fear
 All Argos, Greece, Electra, and Orestes.
 How dreadful 'tis to hate the blood that flow'd
 Congenial with our own, to dread the names
 Which mortals hold so sacred and so dear !
 But injur'd nature, banish'd from my heart,
 Indignant frowns, and to avenge herself
 Now bids me tremble at the name of son.

S C E N E V.

ÆGISTHUS, CLYTEMNÆSTRA.

CLYTEMNÆSTRA.

Cruel Ægisthus, wherefore wou'dst thou lead me
 To this sad place, the seat of death and horror ?

ÆGISTHUS.

Is then the solemn pomp, the feast of joy,
 To sweet remembrance of our prosp'rous days,
 Grown hateful to thee, is our marriage day
 A day of horror ?

CLYTEMNÆSTRA.

No : but here, Ægisthus,
 There may be danger : my unhappy children
 Have fill'd this heart with anguish : poor Iphisa

38 O R E S T E S.

Weeps her hard lot ; Electra is in chains ;
This fatal place reminds me of the blood
We shed, reminds me of my dear Orestes,
Of Agamemnon.

Æ G I S T H U S.

Let Iphisa weep,
And proud Electra rave ; I bore too long
Her bitter taunts, 'tis fit her haughtiness
Shou'd now be humbled ; I'll not suffer her
To stir up foul rebellion in my kingdom,
To tell the factious that Orestes comes,
And call down vengeance on me ; ev'ry hour
That hated name is echo'd in my ear ;
I must not bear it.

C L Y T E M N Æ S T R A.

Ha ! what name was that ?
Orestes ! O, I shudder at the thought
Of his approach : an oracle long since
Declar'd, that here, ev'n at the fatal tomb
Whither thou lead'st, his parricidal hand
Shou'd one day rise vindictive, and destroy us.
Why therefore would'st thou tempt the gods,
why thus
Expose a life so dear to Clytemnæstra ?

Æ G I S T H U S.

Be not alarm'd ; Orestes ne'er shall hurt thee :
His

His be the danger; for I have sent forth
 Some friends in search of him, and soon I hope
 Shall see him in the toils; a wretched exile
 From clime to clime he roams, and now it seems
 In Epidaurus' gloomy forest hides
 His ignominious head; but there perhaps
 We have more friends than Clytemnæstra thinks of;
 The king may serve us.

CLYTEMNÆSTRA:

But, my son—

ÆGISTHUS.

I know

He's fierce, implacable, revengeful; stung
 By his misfortunes, all the blood of Atreus
 Boils in his breast, and animates his rage.

CLYTEMNÆSTRA.

Alas! my lord, his rage is but too just.

ÆGISTHUS.

Be it our bus'ness then to make it vain;
 Thou know'st I've sent my Plithones in secret
 To Epidaurus.

CLYTEMNÆSTRA.

But for what?

ÆGISTHUS,

ÆGISTHUS.

To fix

My throne in safety, and remove thy fears :
 Yes, Plisthenes, my son, by thee adopted
 Heir to my kingdom, knows too well how much
 His int'rest must depend on the event
 E'er to neglect his charge : he is thy son,
 Think of no other : had Electra's heart
 Submissive yielded to another's counsels,
 She had been happy in my Plisthenes :
 But she shall feel the power which she contemns,
 She and her haughty brother, her Orestes,
 He may be found perhaps.—You seem disturb'd.

CLYTEMNESTRA.

Alas ! Ægisthus, must we sacrifice
 More victims ? must I purchase length of days
 With added guilt ? Thou know'st whose blood
 we shed—

And must my son too perish, must I pay
 So dear a price for life ?

ÆGISTHUS.

Remember—

CLYTEM-

CLYTEMNÆSTRA.

No:

First let me ask the sacred oracle——

ÆGISTHUS.

What canst thou hope from gods or oracles;
Were they consulted on the blissful day
That gave Ægisthus to his Clytemnæstra?

CLYTEMNÆSTRA.

Thou hast recall'd a time when heav'n, I fear,
Was much offended: love defies the gods,
But fear adores them; guilt weighs down my soul,
Do not oppress my feeble spirits; time,
That changes all, hath alter'd this proud heart;
The hand of heaven is on me, and subdues
The haughty rage that once inspir'd my breast;
Not that my tender friendship for Ægisthus
Can e'er decay, our int'rests are the same;
But to behold my daughter made a slave,
To think on my poor lost abandon'd son,
To think that now, ev'n now, perhaps he dies
By vile assassins, or, if living, lives
My foe, and hates the guilty Clytemnæstra,
Is it not dreadful? Pity me, Ægisthus;
I am a mother still.

ÆGISTHUS.

ÆGISTHUS.

Thou art my wife;
 Thou art my queen ; resume thy wonted courage,
 And be thyself again ; indulge no more
 This foolish fondness for ungrateful children,
 Who merit not thy love ; consult alone
 Ægisthus' safety, and thy own repose.

CLYTEMNÆSTRA.

Repose ! the guilty mind can ne'er enjoy it.

END of the FIRST ACT.

ACT II. SCENE I.

ORESTES, PYLADES.

ORESTES.

WHITHER, my Pylades, hath cruel fate
 Conducted us ? alas ! Orestes lives
 But to increase the sorrows of his friend :
 Our arms, our treasures, and our soldiers lost
 In the rude storm ; here on this desert coast,
 No succour near, deserted and forlorn
 We wander on, and nought but hope remains.
 Where are we ?

PYLADES.

PYLADES.

That I know not ; but since fate
Hath led us hither, let us not despair ;
It is enough for me, Orestes lives :
Be confident ; the barbarous Ægisthus
In vain pursu'd thy life, which heav'n preserv'd
In Epidaurus, when thy arm subdu'd
The gallant Plifthenes . let nought alarm
Or terrify thy soul, but boldly urge
Thy way, protected by that guardian god
Who watches o'er the just, the great avenger,
Who hath already to thy valour giv'n
The son, and promis'd that e'er long the father
Shall follow him.

O R E S T E S.

Alas, my friend, that God
In anger now withdraws his pow'rful aid,
And frowns upon us, as thy cruel fate
Too plainly shews ; a terrible example !
But say, within the rock did'st thou conceal
The urn, which to Mycenæ, horrid seat
Of murder, by the god's command, we bear ;
That urn which holds the ashes of my foe,
Of Plifthenes ; with that we must deceive
The tyrant.

PYLADES.

PYLADES.

I have done it.

O R E S T E S.

Gracious heav'n!

When shall we reap the fruits of our obedience?
 When will the wish'd-for day of vengeance come?
 Shall I again behold my native soil,
 The dear, the dreadful place, where first I saw
 The light of day? Where shall I find my sister,
 The pride, the glory, of admiring Greece?
 That gen'rous maid, whom all unite to praise,
 But none will dare to succour? She preserv'd
 My life; and, worthy of her noble father,
 Hath never bent beneath th' oppressive hand
 Of pow'r, but brav'd the fury of the storm.
 How many kings, how many heroes, fought
 For Menelaus! Agamemnon dies,
 And Greece forgets him, whilst his hapless son,
 Deserted, wanders o'er a faithless world,
 To seek some bless'd asylum for repose.
 Alas, without thy friendship I had been
 The most distress'd, most abject of mankind;
 But heav'n, in pity to my woes, hath sent
 My Pylades; it wou'd not let me perish,
 But gave me to subdue my hated foe,

And

O R E S T E S.

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And half revenge my father : say, my friend,
What path will lead us to the tyrant's court ?

P Y L A D E S.

Behold that palace, and the tow'ring height
Of yon proud temple, the dark grove o'ergrown
With cyprus, and the tomb, rich images
Of mournful splendor all : and see ! this way
Advancing, comes a venerable sage,
Of mildest aspect, and whose years, no doubt,
Have long experience of calamity ;
His soul will melt at thy disastrous fate.

O R E S T E S.

Is ev'ry mortal born to suffer ? hark !
He groans, my Pylades.

S C E N E II.

O R E S T E S, P Y L A D E S, P A M M E N E S.

P Y L A D E S.

Whoe'er thou art,
Stop, and inform us : we are strangers here.
Two poor unhappy friends, long time the sport
Of winds and waves, now on this unknown shore
Cast helpless, canst thou tell us if this place
Will be or fatal to us, or propitious ?

P A M -

PAMMENES.

I am a simple, plain, old man, and here
 Worship the gods, adore their justice, live
 In humble fear of them, and exercise
 The sacred rights of hospitality ;
 Ye both are welcome to my little cottage,
 There to despise with me the pride of kings,
 Their pomp and riches : come my friends, for such
 I ever hold the wretched.

O R E S T E S.

Gen'rous stranger,
 May gracious heav'n inspire us with the means
 To recompence thy goodness ! but inform us
 What place is this ; who is your king ?

PAMMENES.

Ægisthus :

I am his subject.

O R E S T E S.

Terrors, crimes, and vengeance !
 O Heaven, Ægisthus !

P Y L A D E S.

Soft : do not betray us ;
 Be careful.

O R E S T E S.

Gods, Ægisthus ! he who murther'd—

P A M—

O R E S T E S.

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PAMMENES.

The same.

O R E S T E S.

And Clytemnæstra, lives she still
After that fatal blow?

PAMMENES.

She reigns with him;
The rest is known too well,

O R E S T E S.

That tomb before us,
And yonder palace——

PAMMENES.

Is inhabited
Now by Ægisthus; built, I well remember,
By worthier hands, and for a better use.
The tomb thou see'st, forgive me if I weep
At the remembrance, is the tomb of him
I lov'd, my lord, my king—of Agamemnon.

O R E S T E S.

O 'tis too much! I sink beneath it.

P Y L A D E S.

Hide

Thy tears, my friend.

[To Orestes, who turns away from him.

P A M-

PAMMENES.

You seem much mov'd, and fain
 Wou'd stop the tide of grief: O give it way,
 Indulge thy sorrows, and lament the son
 Of gods, the noble conqueror of Troy;
 Whilst they insult his sacred mem'ry here,
 Strangers shall weep the fate of Agamemnon,

O R E S T E S.

A stranger as I am, I cannot look
 With cold indiff'rence on the noble race
 Of Atreus; 'tis a Grecian's duty ever
 To weep the fate of heroes, and I ought—
 But doth Electra live in Argos still?

PAMMENES.

She doth, she's here.

O R E S T E S.

I run, I fly to meet her.

P Y L A D E S.

Ha! whither woud'st thou go! what, brave the gods!
 Hazard thy precious life! forbear, my lord.

[To Pammenes.

O! sir, condu&t us to the neighb'ring temple,

There

ORESTES. 49

There will we lay our gifts before the altar
In humble duty, and adore that god
Who rul'd the waves, and sav'd us from destruction.

ORESTES.

Wilt thou conduct us to the sacred tomb
Where lie the ashes of a murder'd hero?
There must I offer to his honour'd shade
A secret sacrifice.

PAMMENES.

O heav'nly justice,
Thou sacrifice to him! amidst his foes!
O noble youth! my master had a son,
Who, in Electra's arms—but I forbear,
Ægisthus comes: away; I'll follow you.

ORESTES.

Ægisthus! ha!

PYLADES.

We must avoid his presence.

SCENE III.

ÆGISTHUS, CLYTEMNÆSTRA, PAMMENES.

ÆGISTHUS. [To Pammenes,

Who are those strangers? one of them methought
Seem'd, by his stately port and fair demeanor,
Of noble birth, a gloom of melancholy

Hangs

Hangs on his brow : he struck me as he past :
Is he our subject ? know ye whence he came ?

PAMMENES.

I only know they are unfortunate ;
Driv'n by the tempest on those rocks, they came
For shelter here ; as strangers I reliev'd them ;
It was my duty : if they tell me truth,
Greece is their country.

ÆGISTHUS.

Thou shalt answer for them
On peril of thy life.

CLYTEMNÆSTRA.

Alas ! my lord,
Can these poor objects raise suspicion ?

ÆGISTHUS.

Yes.

The people murmur ; ev'ry thing alarms me.

CLYTEMNÆSTRA.

Such for these fifteen years hath been our fate,
To fear, and to be fear'd ; the bitter poison
To all my happiness.

ÆGISTHUS.

Away, Pammenes ;
Let me know who and whence they are ; why thus
They

'They come so near the palace ; from what port
 Their vessel sail'd, and wherefore on the seas
 Where I command : away, and bring me word.

S C E N E IV.

ÆGISTHUS, CLYTEMNÆSTRA.

ÆGISTHUS.

Well, Madam, to remove your idle fears;
 Th' interpreters of heav'n it seems, at length,
 Have been consulted ; but in vain : their silence
 Doubles your grief, and heightens your despair ;
 For to thyself, thy restless spirit ne'er
 Will know repose ; thou tremblest at the thought
 Of thy son's death, yet fear'st his dang'rous life :
 Consult no more your doubtful oracles,
 And hesitating priests, that brood in secret
 O'er the dark bosom of futurity ;
 But hear Ægisthus, he shall give thee peace,
 And satisfy thy soul : this hand determines,
 This tongue pronounces Clytemnæstra's fate :
 If thou woud'st live and reign, confide in me,
 And me alone, and let me hear no more
 Of your unworthy son ; but for Electra,
 She's to be fear'd, and we must think of her :
 Perhaps her marriage with my Plisthenes
 Might stop the mouth of faction, and appease

The discontented people : thou woud'st wish
 To see the deadly hatred, that so long
 Hath rag'd between us, soften'd into peace ;
 To see our int'rests and our hearts united :
 Let it be so. Go thou, and talk with her ;
 But take good heed her pride refuses not
 The proffer'd boon ; that were an insult soon
 She might repent of : but I hope with you,
 That slav'ry hath bow'd down her haughty spirit,
 That this unhop'd for, unexpected change
 From poverty and chains to rank and splendor,
 Join'd to a mother's kind authority,
 And above all, ambition, will persuade her
 To seize the golden minute, and be wise.
 But if she spurns the happiness that courts her,
 Her insolence shall meet its due reward.
 Your foolish fondness, and her father's name,
 Have fed her pride too long ; but led her dread,
 If she submits not, a severer fate,
 Chains heavier far, and endless banishment,

S C E N E V.

CLYTEMNÆSTRA, ELECTRA.

CLYTEMNÆSTRA.

Come near, my daughter, and with milder looks
 Behold thy mother : I have mourn'd in secret,
And

And wept with thee thy hard and cruel bondage,
 Though not unmerited; for sure thy hatred
 Was most unjust, Electra: as a queen,
 I was offended; as a mother, griev'd:
 But I have gain'd your pardon, and your rights
 Are all restor'd.

ELECTRA.

O Madam, at your feet——

CLYTEMNÆSTRA.

But I wou'd still do more.

ELECTRA.

What more?

CLYTEMNÆSTRA.

Support

Your race, restore the honour'd name of Pelops,
 And re-unite his long-divided children.

ELECTRA.

Ha! talk'st thou of Orestes? speak, go on.

CLYTEMNÆSTRA.

I speak of thee, and hope at last Electra
 Will be Electra's friend: I know thy soul
 Aspires to empire; be thyself again;
 And let thy hopes transport thee to the throne
 Of Argos and Mycenæ; rise from chains

And ignominious slav'ry to the throne
 Of thy great ancestors : Ægisthus yields
 To my intreaties ; as a daughter yet
 He wou'd embrace thee ; to his Plisthenes
 Wou'd join Electra ; ev'ry hour the youth
 From Epidaurus is expected here ;
 When he returns he weds you : look, my daughter,
 Tow'rd the bright prospect of thy future glory,
 And bury all the past in deep oblivion.

E L E C T R A.

Can I forget the past, or look with joy
 On that which is to come ? O cruel fate,
 This is the worst indignity that e'er
 Electra bore : remember whence I sprang ;
 Remember, I am Agamemnon's daughter,
 And would'st thou bind me to his murth'rer's son ?
 Give me my chains again, oppress my soul
 With all the horrors of base servitude ;
 All that the tyrant e'er inflicted on me,
 Shame and reproach suit with my sad condition ;
 I have supported them, and look'd on death
 Without a fear : a thousand times Ægisthus
 Hath threaten'd me with death, but this is worse ;
 Thou art more cruel far to ask my vows,
 My love, my honour : but I see your aim,
I know

I know your purpose ; poor Orestes slain,
 His murth'rer trembles at a sister's claim,
 And dreads my title to a father's throne :
 The tyrant wants my hand to second him,
 To seal his poor precarious rights with mine,
 And make me an accomplice in his guilt.
 O if I have a right Ægisthus fears,
 Let him erase my title in my blood,
 And tear it from me : if another arm
 Be needful to his purpose, lend him thine ;
 Strike here, and join Electra to her brother ;
 Strike here, and I shall know 'tis Clytemnæstra.

CLYTEMNÆSTRA.

It is too much : ungrateful as thou art,
 I pity thee ; but all my hopes are past.
 What have I done, what wou'd I do, to bend
 Thy stubborn heart ? tears, menaces, reproaches,
 And love and tenderness, the throne itself,
 Which but for me thou never cou'd'st have hop'd,
 Pray'rs, punishment, and pardon, nought avail'd ;
 And now I yield thee to thy fate : farewell !
 Thou say'st that thou shalt know me for thy mo-
 ther,

For Clytemnæstra, by my cruelty :
 I am thy mother, and I am thy queen,

Remember that : to Agamemnon's race
 Nought do I owe but hatred and revenge ;
 I will not warm a serpent in my breast
 To sting me : henceforth storm, complain, and
 weep,

I shall not heed the clamours of a slave.
 I lov'd thee once, with grief I own I lov'd thee ;
 But from this hour remember Clytemnæstra
 Is not thy mother, but Ægisthus' wife :
 The bonds are broken that united us,
 Electra broke them ; nature hath disclaim'd,
 And I abjure them.

S C E N E VI.

ELECTRA, alone.

Gracious heav'n ! is this
 A mother's voice ? O day the bitt'rest sure
 That ever rose since my dear father's death !
 I fear I said too much ; but my full heart,
 Spite of myself, wou'd pour its venom forth :
 She told me my Orestes was no more ;
 Cou'd I bear that ? O if a cruel mother
 Has robb'd me of my best, my dearest treasure,
 Why shou'd I court my worst of foes, why fawn
 And cringe to her, to live a vile dependent

On

On her precarious bounties ; to lift up
 These wither'd hands to unrelenting heav'n,
 To see my father's bed and throne usurp'd
 By this base spoiler, this inhuman tyrant,
 Who robb'd me of a mother's heart, and now
 Hath ta'en Orestes from me?

S C E N E VII.

ELECTRA, IPHISA.

IPHISA.

O Electra,

Complain no more.

ELECTRA.

Why not?

IPHISA.

Partake my joy.

ELECTRA.

Joy is a stranger to this heart, Iphisa,
 And ever shall be.

IPHISA.

Still there's hope.

ELECTRA.

O no,

Still must we weep : for if I may believe

D 4

A mo-

A mother, our dear brother, our Orestes,
Is dead.

I P H I S A.

And if I may believe these eyes,
He lives, he's here, Electra.

E L E C T R A.

Can it be?

Good heav'n! O do not trifle with a heart
Like mine: Iphisa, did'st thou say Orestes?

I P H I S A.

I did:

E L E C T R A.

Thou woud'st not with a flatt'ring dream
Deceive me, my Iphisa—but, go on,
For hope and fear distract me.

I P H I S A.

O my sister,
Two strangers, cast by some benignant God
On these unhappy coasts, are just arriv'd,
And hither, by the care of good Pammenes,
Conducted; one of them——

E L E C T R A.

I faint: I die——

Well, one of them——

I P H I S A.

IPHISIA.

I saw the noble youth:

O' what a lustre sparkled in his eye;
His air, his mein, his ev'ry gesture bore
The perfect semblage of a demi-god;
Ev'n as they paint th'illustrious Grecian chief,
The conqueror of Troy; such majesty
And sweet deportment ne'er did I behold:
But with Pammenes he retir'd, and hid
His beauteous form from my desiring eyes:
Struck with the charming image, and amaz'd,
I ran to seek thee here, beneath the shade
Of this dark grove, to tell the pleasing tale:
But mark what follow'd—on the sacred tomb,
Where we so oft have mingled our sad tears,
I saw fresh garlands, saw the votive wreath,
The water sprinkled o'er it, and the hair
Doubtless of those whom I so late had seen,
Th' illustrious strangers: near to these was laid,
What most confirm'd my hopes, a glitt'ring sword,
That spoke methought the day of vengeance near:
Who but a son, a brother, and a hero,
Rais'd by the gods to save his falling country,
Wou'd dare to brave the tyrant thus? 'Tis he,
Electra, heav'n hath sent him to our aid,

D 5.

The.

The lightning glares upon us, and the thunder
Will soon be heard.

ELECTRA.

I must believe Iphisa,
And hope the best ; but is it not a snare
Laid by the tyrant ? Come : we'll know the truth,
Let us away—I must be satisfy'd.

IPHISA.

We must not search him in the dark retreat
Where he is hid ; Pammenes says, his life
Wou'd answer for it.

ELECTRA.

Ha ! what do'st thou say ?
Alas ! we are deceiv'd, betray'd, Iphisa,
By cruel heav'n : thus, after fifteen years,
Restor'd, Orestes wou'd have ran with joy
To the dear arms that sav'd him, wou'd have
cheer'd

Electra's mournful heart ; he ne'er had fled
From thee, Iphisa : O that sword thou saw'st,
Which rais'd thy sanguine hope, alarms my fears ;
A cruel mother wou'd be well inform'd,
And in her eyes I read the barb'rous joy
She felt within : O dart one ray of hope,
Ye vengeful gods, on my despairing soul !

Will

Will not Pammenes yield to my intreaties?
He will; he must: away, I'll speak to him.

I P H I S A.

Do not, Electra; think what cruel eyes
Watch o'er our steps, and mark our ev'ry action.
If he is come, we shall discover him
By our fond zeal, and hazard his sweet life:
If we're deceiv'd, our search but irritates
The tyrant, and endangers good Pammenes:
But let us pay our duty at the tomb,
There we at least may weep without offence.
Who knows, Electra, but the noble stranger
May meet us in that blest asylum; there
That heav'n, whose goodness thy impatient rage
Hath call'd in question, may yet hear my vows,
And give him to our wishes and our tears:
Let us be gone.

E L E C T R A.

Thou hast reviv'd my hopes:
But O! I die with grief if thou deceiv'st me.

END of the SECOND ACT.

A C T III. S C E N E I.

O R E S T E S, P Y L A D E S, P A M M E N E S.

[A Slave at the further end of the stage carrying an urn, and a sword.]

P A M M E N E S.

BLEST be the day that to our wishes thus
 Restores the long-expected hope of Greece,
 My royal master's son, the minister
 Of heav'n's high will, to execute swift vengeance
 On Agamemnon's foes ! The tyrant long
 Hath dreaded, long foreseen th' impending blow ;
 Conscious of guilt, in ev'ry face unknown
 Still he beholds his master and his judge,
 And still Orestes haunts his troubled soul :
 Much he enquires concerning you, and longs
 To see you both. I have a thousand fears,
 A thousand hopes ; heav'n grant we may succeed !
 Mean time I have obey'd your orders, founded
 The people's hearts, and strove to animate
 Their zeal ; inspir'd them with the distant hope
 Of an avenger ; soon or late the race
 Of rightful kings must prosper : ev'ry heart
 Glow'd with warm transport at Orestes' name ;
 Awaken'd from her slumber, Vengeance rises
With

O R E S T E S. 63.

With double vigour ; my few faithful friends,
 Who dwell in this lone desert with Pammenes,
 Lift up their hands to heav'n, and call on thee ;
 And yet I tremble to behold thee here-
 Unarm'd, and unassisted, lest some chance
 Discover thee, and blast our hopes : the foe
 Is barb'rous, active, vigilant, and bold :
 One fatal stroke may ruin all ; whilst thou,
 Against a tyrant seated on his throne,
 Bring'st nothing but Orestes, and his friend.

P Y L A D E S.

And are not they sufficient ? 'Tis the work
 Of heav'n that oft fulfils its own designs
 By means most wonderful, that in the deep
 O'erwhelm'd our little all, and here alone
 Hath left us to perform the sacrifice.
 Sometimes it arms the sov'reigns of the earth
 With tenfold vengeance ; sometimes, in contempt
 Of human valour, strikes in awful silence ;
 Nature and friendship then exert the rights
 Of heav'n, and vindicate its pow'r divine.

O R E S T E S.

Orestes asks no other aid, no arm
 But thine, my Pylades.

P Y L A D E S.

PYLADES.

Take heed, my friend ;

Quit not the paths of safety pointed out
By the just gods ; remember thou art bound
By solemn oath to hide thee from Electra ;
Your peace, your happiness, your kingdom, all
Depend upon it : O refrain your transports,
Dissemble, and obey ; 'tis fit Electra
Shou'd be deceiv'd, ev'n more than Clytemnæstra.

PAMMENES.

Thank heav'n, that thus ordain'd it for thy
safety.

Already hath Electra, bath'd in tears,
And calling for her great avenger, fill'd
These solitary mansions with her cries ;
Importunate and bold, she sought me out,
And with imprudent warmth, demanded loud,
Where was her brother, where her dear Orestes :
Nature had whisper'd to her anxious heart
He was not far from his Electra : scarce
Cou'd I with-hold her eager steps.

O R E S T E S.

Ye gods !

Must I refrain ? O insupportable !

PYLADES.

P Y L A D E S.

You hesitate : O think, my dear Orestes,
Think on the menaces of angry heav'n;
Think on its goodness that preserv'd thy life
From ev'ry danger ; if thou should'st oppose
Its sacred will, eternal wrath awaits
To blast thy purpose ; tremble, son of Atreus .
And Tantalus, remember what thy hapless race
Hath suffer'd, nor expect a milder doom.

O R E S T E S.

What pow'r invincible presides unseen
O'er human actions, and directs our fate ?
Is it a crime to listen to the voice
Of fond affection ! O eternal justice,
Thou deep abyss, unsearchable to man !
Shall not our weakness and our guilt by thee
Be still distinguish'd ? shall the man who wanders
From virtue's paths unknowing, and who braves
Thy pow'r, shall he who yields to nature's laws,
And he who breaks them, share an equal fate ?
But shall the slave condemn his master ? heav'n
Gave us our being, and can owe us nothing :
Therefore no more : in silence I obey.
Give me the urn, the ring, and bloody sword,
Which thou hast hither brought, they shall be
offer'd

Far

Far from Electra's sight : let us be gone ;
I'll see my sister when I have reveng'd her.

[Turning to Pammenes.

Go thou, Pammenes, and prepare the hearts
Of thy brave followers for the great event
Which Greece awaits, and I must execute :
Deceive Ægisthus, and my guilty mother ;
Let them enjoy the transitory bliss,
The short-liv'd pleasure of Orestes' death,
If an unnatural mother can behold
With joy the ashes of a murder'd son :
Here will I wait, and stop them as they pass.

S C E N E II.

ELECTRA and IPHISA on one side of the
Stage, ORTESTES and PYLADES on the
other, with a slave carrying an urn, and a
sword.

ELECTRA.

[To Iphisa.

Hope disappointed is the worst of sorrows.
O my Iphisa, all thy flat'ring dreams
Are vanish'd, and Pammenes, with a word,
Hath undeceiv'd us ; the fair day that shone
So bright is clouded o'er, and darkness spreads
On ev'ry side : alas ! our wretched life
Is but a round of never-ending woes.

O R E S T E S,

O R E S T E S.

[To Pylades.

Two women, and in tears !

P Y L A D E S.

Alas, my lord,

Beneath a tyrant all things wear the face
Of grief and mis'ry.

O R E S T E S.

In Ægisthus' court

Nothing should reign but sorrow.

I P H I S A.

[To Electra.

Look Electra,

The strangers come this way.

E L E C T R A.

Unhappy omen !

They did pronounce Ægisthus' hated name.

I P H I S A.

One is that hero whom I told thee of ;
The noble youth—

E L E C T R A.

[Looking at Orestes.

Alas ! I too, like thee,

Had been deceiv'd.

[Turning

[Turning to Orestes.

Who are ye, wretched strangers;
And what has lead you to this fatal shore?

O R E S T E S.

We come to see the king who reigns in Argos,
And take our orders from him.

E L E C T R A.

Are ye Grecians,
And call ye him a king, the murtherer
Of Agamemnon?

O R E S T E S.

He is sov'reign here,
And heav'n commands us to respect his throne,
Not to dispute his title.

E L E C T R A.

Horrid maxim!
And what have you to ask of this proud king,
This bloody monster here?

O R E S T E S.

We come to bring him
Some happy tidings.

E L E C T R A.

Dreadful then to us
They must be.

I P H I S A.

O R E S T E S. 69

I P H I S A.

[Seeing the urn.

Ha ! an urn ! O grief, O horror !

P Y L A D E S.

Orestes—

E L E C T R A.

O ye Gods ! Orestes dead !

I faint, I die.

O R E S T E S.

What have we done, my friend !

They cou'd not be mistaken, for their grief
Betrays them : O ! my blood runs cold.—Fair
princess,

Be comforted, and live.

E L E C T R A.

Orestes dead ?

And can I live ? O no, barbarians, here
Complete your cruelty.

I P H I S A.

Alas ! you see

The poor remains of Agamemnon ; we
Are his unhappy daughters, the sad sisters
Of lost Orestes.

O R E S T E S.

O Electra ? O

Iphisa ? O where am I ? cruel gods !

[To the slave carrying the urn.

Take from their sight those monuments of woe,
That

That fatal urn, which—

ELECTRA.

[Running towards the urn.

Woud'st thou take it from me?

Woud'st thou deprive me of the little all

That's left Electra by offended heav'n?

O give it me.

[She takes the urn and embraces it.

O R E S T E S.

Forbear; what wou'dst thou do?

P Y L A D E S.

Away: Ægisthus only must receive

These precious reliques.

ELECTRA.

Must I then behold

My brother's ashes in a tyrant's hand,

And are Orestes' murderers before me?

O R E S T E S.

Horrid reproach! it shocks my very soul:

I can no longer—

ELECTRA.

Yet you weep with me:

O, in the name of the avenging gods,

If

O R E S T E S. 71

If you are guiltless, if your gen'rous hands
Collected his dear ashes—

O R E S T E S.

Gracious heav'n !

E L E C T R A.

If ye lament his death, O answer me :
Who told you of his fate : art thou his friend ?
Speak, noble youth : both dumb ! yet both
afflicted :

Ev'n whilst your words plant daggers in my heart,
Ye seem to pity me.

O R E S T E S.

It is too much ;
The gods have been obey'd enough already.

E L E C T R A.

What say'st thou ?

O R E S T E S.

Leave those poor remains.

E L E C T R A.

O no :

I never will : alas ! is ev'ry heart
Inflexible ? I tell thee, cruel stranger,
I must not, cannot give thee back again
The fatal gift that pity hath bestow'd :
'Tis my Orestes ; and I will embrace him :
Behold his dying sister.

O R E S.

O R E S T E S.

O R E S T E S.

Cruel gods !

Where are your thunders now ? O strike : Electra,
I can no longer—

E L E C T R A.

Ha !

O R E S T E S.

I ought—

P Y L A D E S.

O heav'n !

E L E C T R A.

Go on—

O R E S T E S.

Know then—

S C E N E III.

ÆGISTHUS, CLYTEMNÆSTRA, ORESTES,
PYLADES, ELECTRA, IPHISA, PAMMENES,
Guards.

Æ G I S T H U S.

O glorious spectacle !

Fortune, I thank : Can it be, Pammenes ?
My rival dead ? it is, it must be true,
Electra's grief confirms it.

E L E C T R A.

Dreadful hour ?

O R E S.

ELECTRA.

To what am I reserv'd?

ÆGISTHUS.

Seize on the urn,

And wrest it from her.

[They take the urn from her.]

ELECTRA.

O thou hast robb'd me of the only good
 This life cou'd e'er afford me, barb'rous monster!
 O take Electra too, tear forth this heart
 And join me to Orestes; father, son,
 Sister, and brother, all they wretched victims,
 Unite to satiate thy revenge: now, tyrant,
 Enjoy thy happiness, enjoy thy crimes:
 And thou, inhuman mother, look with him
 On the delightful spectacle, it suits
 Thy nature, and is worthy of you both.

[Iphisa leads her off.]

S C E N E IV.

ÆGISTHUS, CLYTEMNÆSTRA,
 ORESTES, PYLADES, Guards.

CLYTEMNÆSTRA.

Must I bear this?

ÆGISTHUS.

She shall be punish'd for it:

Let

Let her complain to heav'n, for heav'n itself
 Will justify Ægisthus ; it approves
 Where it forbids not ; therefore I am guiltless,
 And happy too : my throne stands firmly now,
 My life's in safety ; but I must reward
 The zeal and valour of these noble Grecians.

O R E S T E S.

It was our duty, royal sir, to lay
 These proofs before you : take this sword, this
 ring,
 You must remember it : 'twas Agamemnon's.

C L Y T E M N Æ S T R A.

And was it then by thee Orestes fell ?

Æ G I S T H U S.

If thou hast serv'd me, thine be the reward ;
 But, say, who art thou, of what race ?

O R E S T E S.

My name
 Must not as yet be known ; perhaps hereafter
 It may be : in the fields of Troy my father
 Distinguish'd shone amongst the great avengers
 Of Menelaus ; in those days of glory
 He fought, and fell : deserted and forlorn,
 Left by a cruel mother, and pursued
 By most inhuman foes, this friend alone

Supported

Supported me; was fortune, father, all:
 With him I still have trod the paths of honour,
 With him defy'd the malice of my fate:
 Such is my story.

ÆGISTHUS.

But say where thy arm
 Reveng'd me of this hated prince: inform me.

O R E S T E S.

'Twas in a wood that to the temple leads
 Of Epidaurus, near Achemor's tomb.

ÆGISTHUS.

The king had set a price upon his head:
 How came you not to ask for your reward?

O R E S T E S.

Because I hated infamy, and fought
 For vengeance, not for hire; I did not mean
 To sell his blood; a private motive rais'd
 This arm against him, as my friend well knows,
 And I reveng'd myself without the aid
 Of kings, nor shall I boast the victory:
 Forgive me, sir, I tremble; for the widow
 Of Agamemnon here; perhaps I've serv'd,
 Perhaps offended her; I'll take my leave.

Vol. III.

E

ÆGIS-

I know

Thou shalt not; stay, I charge thee.

CLYTEMNÆSTRA.

Let him go;

That urn, and the sad story he has told,
Have fill'd my soul with horror: heav'n, my lord,
Protects your throne and life, be thankful for it,
And leave a mother to indulge her sorrows.

O R E S T E S.

Madam, I thought that Agamemnon's son
Was hateful to you.

CLYTEMNÆSTRA.

I must own I fear'd him.

O R E S T E S.

Fear'd him?

CLYTEMNÆSTRA.

I did indeed; for he was born
To be most guilty.

O R E S T E S.

Guilty? and to whom?

CLYTEMNÆSTRA.

The wretched wanderer, thou know'st, was doom'd
To hate a mother, doom'd to shed the blood
From whence he sprang; such was his horrid fate;
Perhaps he hath fulfill'd—and yet his death,

I know

ORESTES. 77

I know not why, affrights me, and I tremble
To look on you who sav'd me from his vengeance.

ORESTES.

Alas! a son against a mother arm'd!
O who cou'd loose that sacred tye? perhaps
He wish'd——

CLYTEMNÆSTRA.

O heav'n!

ÆGISTHUS.

'What say'st thou? did'st thou know him?

PYLADES.

[Aside.

He will discover all.

[To Ægisthus.

He did, my lord

The wretched soon unite, and soon divide;
At Delphi first we saw him.

ORESTES.

Yes: I knew

His purpose well.

ÆGISTHUS.

What wa'st?

ORESTES.

To murder thee.

ÆGISTHUS.

I've seen his malice long, but I despis'd it.

78 O R E S T E S.

Mean time Electra us'd Orestes' name
 To spread division o'er my kingdom ; she
 Was my worst foe : thou hast reveng'd me of her,
 Take thy reward, I yield her to thy pow'r ;
 She shall bethine : the haughty maid, who spurn'd
 The great alliance with Ægisthus' son ;
 Henceforth she is thy slave : the wretched race
 Of Priam long beneath the conqueror's yoke
 Submissive bow'd, and drag'd the servile chain :
 And wherefore shou'd not Agamemnon's blood
 Bend in its turn, and share an equal fate ?

CLYTEMNÆSTRA.

Wou'd Clytemnæstra suffer that !

ÆGISTHUS.

Thou would'st not
 Defend thy worst of foes ; proscribe Orestes,
 Yet spare Electra.

[To Orestes.

Leave the urn with me.

O R E S T E S.

We will, my lord, and shall accept your offer.

CLYTEMNÆSTRA.

That were to carry our resentment farther
 Than

Than justice warrants: let him hence and bear
 Some other recompense: we too must go:
 Let us, my lord, I beg thee, let us quit
 These horrid mansions of the dead, where nought
 But dreadful images on ev'ry side
 Surround me: O! we never can prepare
 The bloody feast between the father's tomb
 And the son's ashes: how shall we invoke
 The household gods, whom we have injur'd; how,
 Amid'st our cruel sports, give up the blood
 Of Clytemæstra to the murderer
 Of ~~her~~ Orestes? O it must not be;
 I tremble at the thought: my fears, Ægisthus,
 Shou'd waken thine: this stranger rives my heart;
 His very sight is deadliest poison to me.
 Away, my lord, and let me be conceal'd
 From ev'ry eye: wou'd it were possible
 To hide me from myself!

[Exit Clytemnæstra.]

Æ G I S T H U S.

[To Orestes,

Stay, thou, and wait
 Till time befriend thee; nature for a moment
 Is clamorous and loud, but soon as reason
 Shall reassume its empire, int'rest then
 Must plead thy cause, and she alone be heard.

Mean time remain with us, and celebrate
Our nuptial day :

[To one of his Attendants.

Haste you to Epidaurus,
And hither bring my son; let him confirm
The welcome tidings.

S C E N E V.

O R E S T E S, P Y L A D E S.

O R E S T E S.

Yes, Orestes comes
To join the cruel pomp and make thy feast
A feast of blood.

P Y L A D E S.

O how I tremble for thee !
I fear'd thy love ; I fear'd thy tenderness ;
And more than all, thy honest rage, that burst
In transports forth, when thou beheld'st the tyrant :
I saw thee ready to insult him ; saw
Thy soul take fire at Agamemnon's name,
And dreaded the sad consequence.

O R E S T E S.

My mother,
O Pylades, my mother pierc'd my heart.
Did'st thou not mark the workings of her soul
While I was speaking ? O I felt them all.

Scarce

Scarce cou'd my voice in fault'ring accents tell
 The melancholy tale, whilst Clytemnæstra
 Still gaz'd, and trembled still : a father's murder;
 A sister unreveng'd ; a tyrant yet
 Unpunish'd ; and a mother to be taught
 Her int'rest and her duty ; what a weight
 Of secret cares ! great heav'n complete thy work !
 Urge on the ling'ring moments that retard
 My vengeance ; O let me perform the task
 Of love, and hatred ; let me mix the blood
 Of base Ægisthus with the vile remains
 Of Plisthenes ; let sweet Electra see
 The cruel tyrant gasping at my feet,
 And know her dear deliv'rer in Orestes !

S C E N E VI.

O R E S T E S, P Y L A D E S, P A M M E N E S.

O R E S T E S.

What hast thou done, Pammenes, may we hope—

P A M M E N E S.

O my dear lord, ne'er since the fatal day
 When Agamemnon fell, did greater perils
 Threaten thy precious life.

O R E S T E S.

Ha ! what hath happened ?

E 4

P Y L A -

PYLADES,

Still

Must I have cause to tremble for Orestes ?

PAMMENES.

This instant is arriv'd a messenger
From Epidaurus, and ere this related
The death of Plifthenes.

PYLADES.

Immortal gods !

O R E S T E S,

And knows he that Orestes slew his son ?

PAMMENES.

They speak of nothing but his death ; ere long
Fresh tidings are expected ; and the news
Mean time conceal'd from Greece that she has lost
One of her tyrants ; the king, still in doubt,
Shuts himself up with Clytemnæstra : this
I learn'd from one, who to the royal blood
Still faithful, pines in loathsome servitude
Beneath the proud usurper.

O R E S T E S.

I have gather'd

At least the first fair fruits of promis'd vengeance ;
Grant me, ye gods to reap a plenteous harvest !
Think'ft thou, my friend, they wou'd uplift this arm
In vain, and only prosper to deceive me ;

To

To my successful valor give the son,
And after yield me to the father's power ?
Let us away : danger shou'd make us bold ;
Who fears not death is master of his foe ;
I'll seize the moment of uncertainty,
Ere the full day of truth glares in upon him,
And points his rage.

PAMMENES.

Away : you must be known
To those few noble spirits who will die
To serve their prince ; this secret place conceals
Some faithful friends, who may be still more useful
Because unknown.

P. Y. L. A. D. E. S.

Haste then ; and if the tomb
Of thy dear father, if thy honour'd name
Join'd to Electra's, if the wrath of heav'n
Against usurpers, if the gracious gods
Who hither led thee, if they all shou'd fail,
If this detested spot is doom'd by fate
To be thy grave, O take a wretched life
To thee devoted, we will die together,
That comfort's left ; for Pylades shall fall
Close by thy side, and worthy of Orestes.

O R E S T E S.

Strike me, kind heav'n ! but O for pity save
His matchless valor, and protect my friend !

END OF THE THIRD ACT.

A C T I V. S C E N E I.

O R E S T E S, P Y L A D E S.

O R E S T E S.

PERHAPS the vigilance of good Pammenes
May for a while remove the king's suspicions;
And gracious heav'n, in pity to our woes,
Deceive Ægisthus to a fond belief,
That the devoted race of Tantalus
Is now no more ; but O, my Pylades,
The sword I offer'd at my father's tomb
Is stol'n by sacriligious hands, that reach
Ev'n to the sacred mansions of the dead ;
If it be carried to the tyrant, all
Will be discovered ; let us haste, my friend,
And seize him, ere it be too late.

P Y L A D E S.

Pammenes
Is watchful o'er our int'rest ; we must wait
For him : when we have gather'd the few friends
That

That mean to serve us, be this tomb the place
Of meeting for us all, Pammenes then
Will join us here.

O R E S T E S.

O Pylades, O heav'n!
This barb'rous law that forces me to wound
A tender heart that lives but for Orestes!
And must I leave Electra to her sorrows?

P Y L A D E S.

Yes: thou hast sworn it, therefore persevere;
Thou hast more cause to dread Electra now
Than all thy foes; she may destroy, but ne'er
Can serve us, and the tyrant's eyes may soon
Be open'd: O subdue, if possible,
The pangs of nature, and conceal thy love:
We come not here to comfort thy Electra,
But to revenge her.

O R E S T E S.

See, my Pylades,
She comes this way, perhaps, in search of me,

P Y L A D E S.

Her ev'ry step is watch'd; you must not see her:
Begone: and doubt not, I'll observe her well;
The eyes of friendship seldom are deceiv'd.

S C E N E II.

ELECTRA, IPHISA, PYLADES.

ELECTRA.

The villain hath escap'd me ; he avoids
 My hated sight, and leaves me to my fate,
 To fruitless rage, and unavailing tears,
 Without the hope of vengeance : say, barbarian,
 Thou vile accomplice in his crimes, where went
 The murderer, my tyrant, my new lord,
 (For so it seems Ægisthus has decreed)
 Where is he gone ?

PYLADES.

To do the will of heav'n,
 In dutiful obedience to the gods ;
 And well would it become the royal maid
 To follow his example : fate oft times
 Deceives the hearts of men, directs in secret,
 And guides their wand'ring steps thro' paths un-
 Oftimes it sinks us in the deep abyss [known:
 Of mis'ry, and then raises us to joy ;
 Binds us in chains, or lifts us to a throne,
 And gives us life mid't horrors, tombs, and death.
 Complain no more, but yield to thy new sorrows ;
 Be patient, and be happy : fare thee well.

S C E N E

S C E N E III.

ELECTRA, IPHISA.

ELECTRA.

He swells my rage to fury and despair :
Thinks he I'll tamely bear these cruel insults ?
Cou'd not a father's and a brother's death
Fill up the measure of Electra's woes,
But she must bend beneath the vile assassin
Of her Orestes ; be a common-slave
To all the murth'ers of her hapless race ?
Thou dreadful sword, wet with Orestes' blood,
Expos'd in triumph at the sacred tomb,
Thou execrable trophy, for a moment
Thou did'st deceive me, but thou hast insulted
The ashes of the dead ; I'll make thee serve
A nobler purpose : tho' Ægisthus hides
His guilty head, and with the queen in secret
Plans future crimes, and meditates destruction,
Still we may find the murth'rer of Orestes :
I cannot bathe me in the blood of both
My tyrants, but of one at least my soul
Shall be reveng'd.

IPHISA.

I cannot blame the grief
Which I partake ; but hear me, hear the voice
Of

Of reason ; ev'ry tongue speaks of Orestes ;
 They say, he lives, and the king's fears confirm it ;
 You saw Pammenes talking with this stranger
 In secret, saw his ardent zeal to serve
 And to attend him : think'st thou, our best
 friend,

Our comforter, the good old man, wou'd e'er
 Associate with a murth'rer ? never, never ;
 He cou'd not be so base.

E L E C T R A.

He may be false,

Or weak ; old age is easily deceiv'd :
 We are betray'd by all ; I know we are :
 Did not the cruel stranger boast his deed ?
 Did not Ægisthus yield me up a victim ?
 Was not Electra made the price of guilt,
 The murtherer's reward ? Orestes calls me
 To join him in the tomb : now then, my sister,
 If e'er thou lov'st Electra, pity her
 In her last moments ; bloody they must be,
 And terrible. Away ; inform thyself
 Touching Pammenes ; see if the assassin
 Be with the queen : she flatters all my foes ;
 She heard unmov'd the murther of her son,
 And seem'd, O gods ! a mother seem'd to share
 The guilty transport with her savage lord.

O R S T E E S. 89

O that this sword cou'd reach him in her arms,
And pierce the traitor's heart ! I'll do't.

I P H I S A.

No more :

Indeed you wrong her ; for the fight of him
Offends her : be not thus precipitate
And rash, Electra. I will to Pammenes,
And talk with him : or I am much deceiv'd,
Or by their silence they but mean to hide
Some myst'ry from us : your imprudent warmth
(Yet who wou'd not forgive it in the wretched ?)
Perhaps alarms them, and they wou'd conceal
From you their purpose ; what it is, I know not :
Pammenes seems to shun you, let me go
And speak to him ; but do not, my Electra,
Hazard a deed thou wilt too late repent of.

S C E N E IV.

E L E C T R A.

The subtle tyrants have gain'd o'er Pammenes ;
Old age is weak and fearful : what can faith
Or friendship do against the hand of pow'r ?
Henceforth Electra to herself alone
Shall trust her vengeance : 'tis enough : these
 hands,
Arm'd with despair, shall act with double vigour.
 Arise,

Arise, ye Furies, leave your dark abode.
 For seats more guilty, and another hell;
 Open your dreary caverns, and receive
 Your victims; bring your flaming torches here,
 Daughters of Vengeance, arm yourselves and me;
 Approach, with Death and Terror in your train;
 Orestes, Agamemnon, and Electra
 Invoke your aid: and lo! they come, I see
 Their glitt'ring swords, and unappall'd behold
 them;
 They are not half so dreadful as Ægisthus:
 The murth'rer comes; and see, they throng
 around him;
 Hell points him out, and yields him to my ven-
 geance.

S C E N E V.

ELECTRA, at the bottom of the stage.

ORESTES, on the other side at a distance from her.

O R E S T E S.

Where am I? hither they directed me:
 O my dear country! and, thou fatal spot
 That gave me birth, thou great but guilty race
 Of Tantalus, for ever shall thy blood
 Be wretched? horror here on every side
 Surrounds me: wherefore am I punish'd thus?
 What have I done? why must Orestes suffer
 For his forefather's crimes?

E L E C-

ELECTRA.

[Advancing a little from the bottom of the stage.]

What pow'r with-holds me?

I cannot lift my arm against him; but
I will go on.

O R E S T E S.

Methought I heard a voice:

O my dear father, ever honour'd shade,
Much injur'd Agamemnon, didst thou groan?

ELECTRA.

Just heav'n! durst he pronounce that sacred name?
And see he weeps: can sighs and penitence
Find entrance here? but what is his remorse
To the dire horrors that Electra feels!

[She comes forward.]

He is alone; now strike—die, traitor—O
I cannot——

O R E S T E S.

Gods! Electra, art thou here,
Furious and trembling?

ELECTRA.

Sure thou art some god
Who thus unnerv'st me:—thou hast slain my
brother:

I wou'd have ta'en thy life for't, but the sword
Dropp'd from my hand; thy genius hath prevail'd;
I yield to thee, and must betray my brother.

O R E S.

O R E S T E S.

Betray him, no ! O why am I restrained ?—

E L E C T R A.

At sight of thee my resolution dies,
And all is chang'd : cou'd it be thou who fill'd
My soul with terror ?

O R E S T E S.

O I wou'd repay
Thy precious tears with hazard of my life.

E L E C T R A.

Methought I heard thee speak of Agamemnon.
O gentle youth, deceive me not, but speak :
For I had well nigh done a desperate deed ;
O show me all the guilt of it ! explain
The myst'ry ; tell me who thou art.

O R E S T E S.

O sister :
Of dear Orestes, fly from me, avoid me.

E L E C T R A.

But wherefore I speak.

O R E S T E S.

No more :—I am—take heed !
They see us not together.

E L E C.

ELECTRA.

Gracious heav'n!

Thou fill'st my heart with terror, and with joy.

O R E S T E S.

O if thou lov'st thy brother—

ELECTRA.

Love him! yes;

And O in thee I hear a father's voice,
And see his features; nature hath unveil'd
The myst'ry: O be kind and speak for her.
Do not deny it; say thou art my brother:
Thou art, I know thou art—my dear Orestes;
How could a sister seek thy precious life?

O R E S T E S. [Embracing her.

Heav'n threats in vain, and nature will prevail:
Electra is more pow'rful than the gods.

ELECTRA.

The gods have giv'n a sister to thy vows,
And dost thou fear their wrath?

O R E S T E S.

Their cruel orders

Wou'd have depriv'd me of my dear Electra,
And may perhaps chastise a brother's weakness.

ELECTRA.

ELECTRA.

Thy weakness there was virtue ; O rejoice
With me, Orestes ; wherefore wou'd'st thou
force me

To that rash act ; it might have cost thee dear.

O R E S T E S.

I've broke my sacred promise.

ELECTRA.

'Twas thy duty.

O R E S T E S.

A secret trusted to me by the gods.

ELECTRA.

I drew it from thee ; I extorted it ;
Mine be the guilt ; an oath more sacred far
Binds me to vengeance : what hast thou to fear ?

O R E S T E S.

My destiny, the oracles, the blood
From whence I sprung.

ELECTRA.

That blood henceforth shall flow
In purer streams ; haste then, and join with me
To scourge the guilty ; oracles and gods
Are all propitious to our great design,
And the same pow'r that sav'd, will guide Orestes.

S C E N E.

S C E N E VI.

ELECTRA, ORESTES, PYLADES, PAMMENES.

ELECTRA.

Rejoice with me, my friends, for I have found
My dear Orestes,

PYLADES. [To Orestes.

Haſt thou then reveal'd
The dang'rous ſecret? Could'ſt thou think—

ORESTES.

If heav'n
Expects obedience, it muſt give us laws
We can obey.

ELECTRA.

Can'ſt thou approach him thus
Only for making poor Electra happy?
Would'ſt thou adopt the cruel ſentiments
Of perſecuting foes, and hide Orestes
From my embraces? what unjuſt decree,
What harſh commands—

PYLADES.

I meant to ſave him for thee,
That he might live, and be thy great avenger.

PAMMENES.

Princeſs, thou know'ſt, in this deteſted place
They watch thee nearly; ev'ry ſigh is heard,
And

And every motion carefully observ'd :
 Those private friends, whose humble state eludes
 The tyrant's search, adore this noble youth,
 And wou'd have serv'd him; ev'ry thing's prepar'd;
 But thy imprudence now will hazard all.

E L E C T R A.

Did not Ægisthus give me to a hand,
 Stain'd, as he thought, with my Orestes' blood ?

[To Orestes.

Thou art my master ; I am bound to serve thee ;
 I will obey the tyrant ; his commands,
 For once, are welcome, and the prospect brightens
 On ev'ry side.

P A M M E N E S.

It may be clouded soon,
 Ægisthus is alarm'd, and we have cause
 To tremble ; if he but suspects us, death
 Must be our portion, therefore let us part.

P Y L A D E S. [To Pammenes.

Hence, good Pammenes, bring our friends to-
 gether,

The hours are precious : haste and finish soon
 Thy noble work ; 'tis time we should appear,
 And—like ourselves.

S C E N E

SCENE VII.

ÆGISTHUS, CLYTEMNÆSTRA, ELECTRA,
ORESTES, PYLADES, Guards.

ÆGISTHUS.

Slaves, execute your office,
And bear these traitors to the dungeon.

ORESTES.

Once
There rul'd o'er Argos those who better knew
The rights of hospitality.

PYLADES.

Ægisthus,
What is our crime? Inform us, and at least
Respect this noble youth.

ÆGISTHUS.

Away with them;
Ye stand aghast, as if ye fear'd to touch
His sacred person: hence, I say, take heed
Ye disobey me not: guards, drag them off.

ELECTRA.

O stay, barbarian, stay; for heav'n itself
Pleads for their sacred lives—they tear them
from me,
O gods!

ÆGIS-

ÆGISTHUS.

Electra, tremble for thyself,
Perfidious as thou art, and dread my wrath.

S C E N E VIII.

ELECTRA, CLYTEMNÆSTRA.

ELECTRA.

O hear me, if thou art a mother, hear;
Let me recall thy former tenderness,
Forgive my guilty rage, the sad effect
Of unexampled sorrows; to complain,
Is still the mournful privilege of grief:
Pity these wretched strangers; heav'n perhaps,
Whose dreadful vengeance thou so long hast fear'd,
May for their sakes forgive the past offences;
The pardon thou bestow'st on them may plead
For thee: O save them, save them.

CLYTEMNÆSTRA.

Why shoud'st thou
Be thus sollicitous? What int'rest prompts
Thy ardent zeal?

ELECTRA.

Thou see'st, the gods protect them,
Who sav'd them from the ocean's boist'rous rage,
And brought them here: heav'n gives them to
thy care,

And

O R E S T E S. 99

And will require them at thy hands—to one,
O if they knew't him—but they both are wretched.
Are we in Argos, or at Tauris, where
The cruel priestess bids her altars smoke
With stranger's blood? What must I do to save
them?

Command, and I obey: to Plifthenes
You'd have me wedded; I submit, tho' death
Were far more welcome; lead me to his bed.

CLYTEMNÆSTRA.

You mean to mock us: know't thou not, he's dead?

ELECTRA.

Just heav'n! and hath Ægisthus lost a son?

CLYTEMNÆSTRA.

I see the joy that sparkles in thy eyes;
Thou'rt pleas'd to hear it.

ELECTRA.

No: I am too wretched
To be delighted with another's woe:
I pity the unhappy, nor wou'd shed
The blood of innocence: O save the strangers!
I ask no more.

CLYTEMNÆSTRA.

Away: I understand thee,
And know thee but too well; thou hast confirm'd

The king's suspicions, and reveal'd the secret :
One of these strangers is—Orestes.

ELECTRA.

Well,

Suppose it were; suppose that gracious heav'n,
In tender pity, had restor'd thy son—

CLYTEMNÆSTRA.

O dreadful moment ! how am I to act ?

ELECTRA.

Is it a doubt, and can'st thou hesitate ?
Thy son ! O heav'n ! think on his past misfortunes,
Think on his merits ; but if still thy mind
Is doubtful, all is lost : farewell Orestes.

CLYTEMNÆSTRA.

I'm not in doubt ; I am resolv'd ; ev'n thou,
With all thy fury, can'st not change the love,
The tenderness I bear him : I will guard,
Save, and protect him—he may punish me,
Perhaps he will ; I tremble at his name ;
No matter—I'm a mother still, and love
My children ; thou may'st yet preserve thy hate.

ELECTRA.

No : I will fall submissive at thy feet,
And thank thy bounty : now, indulgent heav'n,
Thy

Thy mercy shines superior to thy wrath :
 For thou hast giv'n a mother to my vows,
 Chang'd her resentful heart, and sav'd Orestes.

END OF THE FOURTH ACT.

ACT V. SCENE I.

ELECTRA.

I Am forbid to enter here ; oppress'd
 With fears, in vain I lift these hands to heav'n :
 Iphisa comes not : but behold the gates
 Are open'd : ha ! she's here, I tremble.

SCENE II.

ELECTRA.

Say,

My dear Iphisa, what have I to hope,
 Will Clytemnæstra dare to be a mother ?
 Has she the pow'r, has she the will to make us
 Some poor amends for all the cruel evils
 She has inflicted on us ; cou'd she e'er——
 But she's a slave to guilt, and to Ægisthus :

F 2

I am

I am prepar'd to hear the worst ; O speak,
Say, all is past, and we must die.

IPHISA.

I hope,
And yet I fear : Ægisthus hath receiv'd
Some dark suggestions, but is doubtful still,
Whether Orestes is his pris'ner here,
And Clytemnæstra never nam'd her son :
She seems to feel a mother's fondness for him,
And, pierc'd with anguish, trembles for his life :
She struggles with herself, and fears alike
To speak or to be silent ; strives to soothe
The tyrant's rage, and save them from his ven-
geance :
But shou'd Orestes once be known, he dies.

ELECTRA.

O cruel thought ! perhaps when I implor'd
My barb'rous mother, I destroy'd Orestes ;
Her grief will but enrage the fierce Ægisthus ;
Nature is ever fatal here : I dread
Her silence, and yet wou'd not have her speak ;
Dangers on ev'ry side : but say, Iphisa,
What hath Pammenes done ?

IPHISA.

His feeble age
Seems strengthen'd by misfortune, and our dangers
But

But breathe new spirit o'er his ardent zeal
 To serve our cause ; he animates our friends
 With double vigour ; ev'n the servile throng,
 That cringe around the tyrant's throne, begin
 To murmur at the name of great Orestes :
 Vet'rans, who serv'd beneath the father, burn
 With honest ardour to support the son :
 Such pow'r have justice and the sacred laws
 O'er mortal minds, howe'er by vice corrupted.

ELECTRA.

O that Electra cou'd inflame their souls
 With glowing virtue, breathe her own fierce spirit
 Into their timid hearts, and animate
 Their cold resentment ! wou'd I had but known,
 Ere he arriv'd on this detested shore,
 That my Orestes liv'd ! or that Pammenes—

S C E N E III.

ÆGISTHUS, CLYTEMNÆSTRA,
 ELECTRA, IPHISA, Guards.

ÆGISTHUS.

Guards, seize that hoary traitor,
 And let him be confronted with those strangers
 Whom I have doom'd to death ; he is their friend,

And confident, th' accomplice in their crimes :
 How dreadful was the snare which they had laid !
 O, Clytemnæstra, 'tis the curs'd Orestes,
 It must be he : do not deceive thyself,
 Do not defend him : O I see it all,
 It is too plain : alas ! this urn contains
 The ashes of my son : the murth'ers brought
 This fatal present to his weeping father.

CLYTEMNÆSTRA.

Can'st thou believe——

ÆGISTHUS.

I can ; I must rely
 On the sworn hatred 'twixt th' unhappy children
 Of Atreus and Thyestes ; must believe
 The time, the place, the rage of fierce Electra,
 Iphisa's tears, your undeserv'd compassion,
 Your ill-tim'd pity for these base assassins ;
 Orestes lives, and I have lost my son !
 But I have caught him in the toils ; whiche'er
 It be, for yet I know not, I'll be just,
 I'll sacrifice the murth'rer to my son,
 And to his mother.

CLYTEMNÆSTRA.

Horrid sacrifice !

I must not see it.

ÆGIS-

ÆGISTHUS.

Horrible to thee?

CLYTEMNÆSTRA.

O yes ; already blood enough hath flow'd
 In this sad scene of slaughter : O 'tis time
 To end the woes of Pelops' hapless race :
 If after all it shou'd not be Orestes,
 Woud'ft thou, on dark suspicion's vague report,
 Murder the innocent ? and if it be
 Indeed my son, my lord, I must defend him,
 Must gain his pardon at thy hands, or perish.

ÆGISTHUS.

I cannot, dare not yield to thy request ;
 For thy own sake I dare not ; thy fond pity
 May be thy ruin ; all that melts thy heart
 To soft compassion, sharpens mine to rage
 And fierce resentment : one of them I know
 Must be Orestes, therefore both shall die ;
 I ought not ev'n to hesitate a moment :
 Guards, do your office.

IPHIS A.

O, my lord, behold me
 Low at your feet ; must all our hapless race
 Thus humbly bend, thus supplicate in vain ?

F 4

Electra,

Electra, kneel with me, embrace his knees,
Thy pride destroys us.

ELECTRA.

Can I stoop so low ?
Shall I bring foul disgrace on thee, my brother,
And ignominy, and shame ? it shocks my soul ;
But I will suffer all to save Orestes.

[Turning to Ægisthus.

If thou wilt save him, here I promise thee,
(Not to forget my father's murther, that
I never can, but) in respectful silence
To pay thee homage, still to live with thee
A willing slave, let but my brother live.

ÆGISTHUS.

Thy brother dies, and thou shalt live a slave ;
My vengeance is complete : thy pride is humbled,
And sues in vain.

CLYTEMNÆSTRA.

Ægisthus, 'tis too much,
To trample thus on the unhappy race
Of him who was thy master once ; away,
Spite of thy rage, I will defend my son ;
Deaf as thou art to a fond sister's pray'rs,
A mother's may prevail : O think, my lord,
Think on thy happy state, above the reach
Of adverse fortune now, Orestes ne'er

Can

Can hurt thee, and Electra bends submissive
Beneath thy pow'r, Iphisa at thy feet;
Can nothing move thee? I have gone too far
Already with thee in the paths of guilt,
And offer'd up a dreadful sacrifice.
Think'st thou I'll yield thee up my purest blood
To glut thy rage? Am I for ever doom'd
To take a murth'rous husband to my arms?
At Aulis one a lovely daughter slew,
The other threatens to destroy my son
Before my eyes, close to his father's tomb:
O rather let this fatal diadem,
Hateful to Greece, and to myself a load
Of mis'ry, fall with me, and be no more
Remember'd! O Ægisthus, well thou know'st,
I lov'd thee, 'tis amongst my blackest crimes,
And stands the foremost; but I love my children,
And will defend them: 'gainst thy arm uprais'd
To shed their blood will lift my vengeful hand,
And blast thy purpose: tremble, for thou know'st
me:

The bands are sacred that united us,
Thy int'rest is most dear to Clytemnæstra:
Remember still, Orestes is my son,
And fear his mother.

ELECTRA.

You surpass my hopes.
 Surely a heart like thine cou'd ne'er be guilty :
 Go on, my honour'd mother, and revenge
 Your children, and your husband.

ÆGISTHUS.

Slave, thou fill'st
 The measure of thy crimes : gods ! shall Ægisthus
 With-hold his vengeance for a woman's cries,
 For Agamemnon's widow, and her children ?
 Unhappy queen ! say, whom do'st thou accuse ?
 Whom dost thou plead for ? hear me and obey.
 Away with them to instant death.

S C E N E IV.

ÆGISTHUS, CLYTEMNÆSTRA, ELECTRA,
 IPHISA, DYMAS.

DYMAS.

My lord ?

ÆGISTHUS.

Thou seem'st disorder'd : what has happen'd ?
 Speak.

DYMAS.

Orestes is discover'd.

IPHISA.

Ha ! where is he ?

CLYTEM-

CLYTEMNÆSTRA.

My son ?

ELECTRA.

My brother ?

ÆGISTHUS.

Have you punish'd him

As he deserves ?

DYMAS.

My lord, as yet he lives.

ÆGISTHUS.

And wherefore were my orders disobey'd ?

DYMAS.

His friend and fellow-captive, Pylades,
Pointed him out, and to the soldiers shew'd
Great Agamemnon's son ; they seem'd much
mov'd ;

I dread the consequence.

ÆGISTHUS.

I must prevent it,

For they shall die : who dares not to revenge me
Shall feel my justice . Dymas, follow me :
Stay thou and guard his sisters ; I defy
The blood of Agamemnon : from the father
Of Plisthenes, and great Thyestes' son,
What mortal, or what god, shall save Orestes ?

F 6

SCENE

S C E N E V.

CLYTEMNÆSTRA, ELECTRA, IPHISA.

IPHISA.

Fear not, but follow him; Electra, speak,
Exhort our friends, and animate their zeal.

ELECTRA.

[To Clytemnæstra.

O in the name of pow'rful nature, now
Complete thy noble work; conduct us, fly—

CLYTEMNÆSTRA.

You must not hence, the guards will not per-
mit it:

Stay here, my children, and rely on me,
On a fond mother, and a tender wife:
I will perform the double task, and take
Orestes and Ægisthus to my care.

S C E N E VI.

ELECTRA, IPHISA

IPHISA.

Alas! th' avenging god pursues us still;
Though she defends Orestes, still Ægisthus
Is at her heart; perhaps the tender cries
Of pity and remorse shall nought avail
Against the tyrant; he is proud, revengeful,
Impla-

Implacable, and furious ; who shall save
If he condemns ? we must submit and die.

ELECTRA.

O that before my death I had not fall'n
So low as to intreat him, to bely
My honest heart, and supplicate the tyrant !
Despair and horror sink me to the tomb
With infamy and shame ; my vain endeavours
To save Orestes, but urge on his fate.
Where are those boasted friends Pammenes
talk'd of,
Who, with fell rancour, and determin'd hate,
Pursued Ægisthus ? Where those vengeful gods
Who hid Orestes from my sight, uprais'd
His righteous arm, and promis'd to support him ?
Where are ye now, infernal goddesses,
Daughters of night, ye who so lately shook
Your dreadful torches here ? All nature once
United seem'd to guard and to protect us,
But all desert us now, all court Ægisthus,
And men and gods, and heav'n and hell betray me.

S C E N E VII.

ELECTRA, PYLADES, IPHISA.

ELECTRA.

What say'st thou, Pylades ? the deed is done ?

PYLADES

PYLADES.

It is : Electra's free, and heav'n obey'd.

ELECTRA.

How ?

PYLADES.

Yes, Orestes reigns : he sent me hither.

IPHISA.

Just gods !

ELECTRA.

Orestes ! is it possible !

I faint, I die with joy.

PYLADES.

Orestes lives,

And has reveng'd the blood of innocence.

ELECTRA.

What wond'rous pow'r hath wrought this strange
event.

PYLADES.

His father's name, Electra's, and his own ;
His valour, and his virtue ; our misfortunes,
Justice and pity ; and the pow'r that pleads
In human hearts for wretchedness like thine.
Pammenes, by the tyrant's order bound,
Was led with us to death ; in weeping crowds
The people follow'd, and deplor'd our fate :

I saw

I saw their rage was equal to their fears,
But the guards watch'd them closely : then
Orestes

Cry'd, strike ye slaves, and sacrifice the last
Of Argos' kings ; ye dare not : when he spoke,
On his fair front such native majesty
And royal lustre shone, we almost thought
Great Agamemnon's spirit from the tomb
Had ris'n, and came once more to bless mankind.
I spoke, and friendship's happy voice prevail'd ;
The people rose, the soldiers stood aghast,
And dropp'd th' uplifted falchions from their
hands ;

The crowd encircled us, and desp'rate love
With friendship join'd, fought nobly for Orestes ;
The joyful people bore him off in triumph :
Ægisthus flew to seize his destin'd prey,
And in the slave he meant to punish, found
A conqueror : pleas'd I saw his humbled pride :
His friends deserted, and his guards betray'd him :
Th' insulting people triumph'd in his fall.

O glorious day ! O all discerning justice !
Ægisthus wears the chains that bound Orestes ;
The queen alone attends, protects, and saves him
From the mad crowd, that press tumultuous on,
Big with revenge, and thirsting for his blood ;
Whilst Clytemnæstra holds him in her arms,

And

And shields him from their rage, implores Orestes
 To save her husband : he respects her still,
 Fulfills the duties of a son and brother :
 Safe from the foe you will behold him soon
 Triumphant here, a conqu'ror and a king.

I P H I S A.

Let us away, to greet the lov'd Orestes,
 And comfort our afflicted mother.

E L E C T R A.

Gods !

What unexpected blifs ! O Pylades,
 Thou best of friends, thou kind protector, haste,
 Let us begone.

P Y L A D E S.

[To his attendants.

Take off those shameful bonds ;

[They take off her chains.

Fall from her hands, ye chains, for they were
 made

To wield a sceptre.

S C E N E VIII.

ELECTRA, IPHISA, PYLADES, PAMMENES,

E L E C T R A.

O Pammenes, where,

Where's my Orestes, my deliverer ?

Why comes he not ?

P A M-

PAMMENES.

This is a dreadful moment,
And full of terror, for his father's spirit
Demands a sacrifice, and justice waits
To pay it, so hath heav'n decreed : this tomb
Must be the altar where the victim's blood
Shall soon be shed ; that sacred duty done,
He will attend thee ; but thou must not see
A sight so terrible : thou know'st the laws
Of Argos suffer not thy spotless hands
To join with his ere the appointed time.

IPHISA.

But say, Pammenes, what of Clytemnæstra,
How acts she in this dreadful crisis ?

PAMMENES.

Vainly
She deprecates the wrath of fierce Orestes,
And strives to save Ægisthus ; kneels for pardon,
And craves the boon she never will obtain :
Meantime the Furies, deaf to her intreaties,
And thirsting for the cruel murth'rer's blood,
Throng round Orestes, and demand his life.

IPHISA,

O may this day of terror be a day
Of pardon and forgiveness ; may it finish

The

116 O R E S T E S.

The cruel woes of our unhappy race !
Hark, Pylades ! Electra, heard ye not
A dreadful groan ?

ELECTRA.

My mother's sure.

PAMMENES.

'Tis she.

CLYTEMNÆSTRA [Behind the scenes.
O spare me !

IPHISA.

Heav'n !

CLYTEMNÆSTRA. [Behind the Scenes.
My son !

ELECTRA.

He kills Ægisthus.

O hear her not, Orestes, but go on,
Revenge, revenge, dissolve the horrid tie,
And sacrifice the murth'rer in her arms :
Strike deep.

CLYTEMNÆSTRA.

My son ! O, thou hast slain thy mother.

PYLADES.

O cruel fate !

IPHISA.

O guilt !

EEEC-

ELECTRA.

O wretched brother !
Crimes punish crimes ; for ever be this day
Lamented by us !

S C E N E IX.

To them O R E S T E S.

O R E S T E S.

Open wide thou earth,
And swallow me : O Clytemnæstra, Atreus,
And Tantalus, I come, I follow you
To Erebus, a part'ner in your crimes,
To share your tortures.

ELECTRA.

O what hast thou done ?

O R E S T E S.

She strove to save him, and I smote them both—
I can no more—

ELECTRA.

She fell then by thy hand !
O dreadful stroke ! and could'st thou—

O R E S T E S.

'Twas not I ;
'Twas not Orestes ; some malignant pow'r.

Guided

Guided my hand, the hateful instrument
 Of heav'n's eternal wrath: Orestes lives
 But to be wretched: banish'd from my country,
 When my dear father fell, my mother slain,
 And by my hand; an exile from the world,
 Bereft of parents, country, fortune, friends,
 Now must I wander: all is lost to me.
 O thou bright orb, thou ever glorious sun,
 Shocked at our crimes, and Atreus's horrid feast,
 Thou didst withdraw thy beams, and yet thou
 On me! O wherefore in eternal night [thin'st
 Dost thou not bury all? O tyrant gods,
 Merciless pow'rs, who punish'd me with guilt
 Yourselves commanded, O for what new crime
 Am I reserv'd? speak—ye pronounce the name
 Of Tauris, there I seek the murth'rous priestess,
 Who offers blood alone to th' angry gods,
 To gods less cruel, less unjust than you.

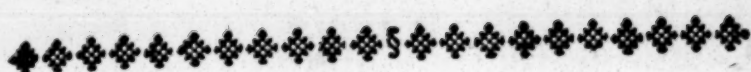
ELECTRA.

Stay, and conjure their justice and their hate.

PYLADES.

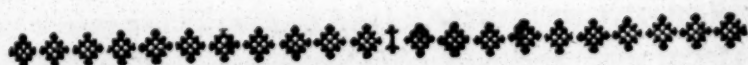
Where'er the gods may lead, thy Pylades
 Shall follow still, and friendship triumph o'er
 The woes of mortals, and the wrath of heav'n.

END of the FIFTH and LAST ACT.



THE
P R O D I G A L.
A
C O M E D Y.

Represented October 10th, 1736.



THE
OFFICE OF THE
SHERIFF OF THE COUNTY OF
SHERIFF

NOTICE

TO ALL WHOM THESE PRESENTS SHALL COME

THAT THE SHERIFF OF THE COUNTY OF

DO HEREBY GIVE NOTICE

THAT HE HAS RECEIVED

FROM THE SHERIFF OF THE COUNTY OF

A CERTAIN SUMMERS

AND THAT HE HAS RECEIVED

FROM THE SHERIFF OF THE COUNTY OF

A CERTAIN SUMMERS

AND THAT HE HAS RECEIVED

FROM THE SHERIFF OF THE COUNTY OF

THE
EDITOR'S
P R E F A C E

To the Edition printed in 1735.

IT is pretty extraordinary, that this comedy should never yet have made its appearance in print, as it is now almost two years since it was first play'd, and ran about thirty nights : as the author of it was not known, it has hitherto been attributed to several persons of the first character ; but it was indisputably written by Mr. de *Voltaire*, though the stile of the *Henriade* and *Alzira* are so extremely different from the stile of this, that we cannot easily conceive them to be the product of the same pen.

In his name we have here presented it to the public, as the first comedy ever written in verses
con-

consisting of five feet * ; a novelty which may perhaps induce other authors to make use of this measure: it will at least be productive of variety on the French theatre, and whoever gives us new pleasures, has always a right to a favourable reception.

If comedy should be an exact representation of manners, this piece has sufficient merit to recommend it ; we see in the *Prodigal* a mixture of the serious and pleasant ; the comic, and the affecting: thus the life of man itself is always checquered, and sometimes even a single incident will produce all these contrasts. Nothing more common than a family, wherein the

* It is astonishing that it should ever enter into the head of a Dramatic writer to put his comedies into rhyme ; but it is still more astonishing that the sensible and ingenious Voltaire should adopt a custom so ridiculous: the confining his verses to five feet has certainly nothing but the novelty to recommend it ; they are even perhaps more faulty than if they had fifteen, by the quicker return of the same sounds to our ear. What pleasure a French author, or a French audience, might take in them, we cannot pretend to determine ; but they are certainly very perplexing to the translator, who finds it extremely difficult to reduce poetic language, and high flown metaphors, to easy and familiar dialogue, without departing too much from the original. The English reader will frequently, I am afraid, meet with a stiffness of style in this comedy, which, with all the pains I have taken, it was impossible to avoid : add to this, that the names of *Fierensat*, *Lise*, *Martba*, &c. sound but uncouthly to us ; and to change them, was a liberty which I thought a translator had no right to take,

father

father grumbles, the daughter, who is in love, whimpers, the son laughs at them both, and the relations take different parts as it happens to suit their inclinations; we often make a joke of that in one room, which we cry at in the next: nay, the same person has often laughed and cried at the same thing within a quarter of an hour.

A certain lady of fashion, being one day at the bedside of her daughter, who lay dangerously ill, with all the family about her, burst into a flood of tears, and cried out, *O my God, my God, restore me my dear daughter, and take all my other children*: a gentleman who had married one of her daughters, came up to her immediately, and taking her by the sleeve, *Pray, madam, says he, do you include your sons in law?* The arch dryness with which he spoke these words had such an effect on the afflicted lady, that she burst into a loud laugh, and went out; the company followed her and laughed too; and the sick person, as soon as she heard the cause of their mirth, laughed more heartily than all the rest.

We do not mean to infer from this, that every comedy should have some scenes of humour and drollery, and others serious and affecting: there

are a great many good pieces where there is nothing but gaiety, others entirely serious ; others where they are mixed, and others where the tender and pathetic are carried so far as to produce tears. Neither of these different species should be excluded from the stage, and if I was to be asked, which is the best of them, I should say, that which was best executed.

It would perhaps be agreeable to the present taste for *reasoning*, and not unsuitable to this occasion, to examine here, what kind of pleasantry that is, which makes us laugh in a comedy. The cause of laughter is one of those things which are easier felt than expressed : the admirable *Moliere*, *Regnard*, who is sometimes almost as admirable as *Moliere*, and the authors of several excellent *petites pieces*, have contented themselves with raising this pleasing sensation, without explaining to us the reasons of it, or telling their secret.

I have observed, with regard to the stage, that violent peals of universal laughter seldom rise but from some *mistake*. *Mercury* taken for *Sofia* ; *Menechmes* for his brother ; *Crispin* making his own will under the name of old master *Geronte* ; *Valere* talking to *Harpagon* of the beauty of his daughter, whilst *Harpagon*

ima-

imagines he is talking of the beauty of his strong box ; *Pourceaugnac*, when they feel his pulse, and want to make him pass for a madman : in a word, mistakes of this kind are generally the only things that excite laughter : Harlequin seldom raises a smile, except when he makes some blunder ; and this accounts for the propriety of the name of *Balourd*, usually given to him.

There are a great many other species of the comic, and pleasantries, that cause a different sort of entertainment ; but I never saw what we call laughing from the bottom of one's soul, either on the stage, or in company, except in cases nearly resembling those which I just now mentioned : there are several ridiculous characters which please, without causing that immoderate laughter of joy. *Trissotin* and *Vadius*, for example, are of this kind : the *Gamester*, and the *Grumbler* likewise, give an inexpressible pleasure, but never cause any bursts of laughter.

There are besides other characters of ridicule, that have in them a mixture of vice, which we love to see well painted, though they only give us a serious pleasure : a bad man will never make us laugh, because laughter always arises from a gaiety of disposition, abso-

lutely incompatable with contempt and indignation : it is true, indeed, we laugh at *Tartuffe*, but not at his hypocrisy ; it is at the mistake of the good old gentleman who takes him for a saint : the hypocrisy once discovered, we laugh no longer, but feel very different impressions.

One might easily trace the spring of every other sentiment, and shew the cause of gaiety, curiosity, interest, emotion, and tears. It would be a proper employment for some of our dramatic authors to lay open these secret springs, as they are the persons who put them in motion : but they are too busy in moving the passions, to find time for an examination into them : they know that one sentiment is worth a hundred definitions, and I am too much of their opinion to prefix a treatise of philosophy to a dramatic performance : I shall content myself with only insisting a little on the necessity we are under of having something new. If we had never brought any thing into the tragic scene but the Roman grandeur, it would have grown at least very disgustful ; and if our heroes had breathed nothing but love and tenderness, we should by this time have been heartily sick of them :

O imi

O imitatores servum pecus !

The works which we have seen since the times of *Corneille*, *Moliere*, *Racine*, *Quinault*, *Lulli*, and *le Brun*, seem to me all of them to have something new and original, which has saved them from contempt and oblivion : once more therefore I repeat it, every species is good, but that which tires us : we should never therefore say, such a piece of music did not succeed, such a picture was not agreeable, such a play was damned, because it was of a new kind ; but such or such a thing failed, because it was really good for nothing.

DRAMATIS PERSONÆ.

Old EUPHEMON.

Young Euphemon.

FIERENFAT, President of Cognac, second son of
Euphemon.

RONDON, a Citizen of Cognac.

LISE, Daughter of Rondon.

MARTHA, Chambermaid to Lise.

JASMIN, Valet to young Euphemon.

Scene, COGNAC.

THE
P R O D I G A L.
A
C O M E D Y.

ACT I. SCENE I.

EUPHEMON, RONDON.

RONDON.

COME, come, chear up, my old melancholy friend, how happy will it make me to see you merry again ! and merry we will be : what a pleasure it is to think my daughter will revive your drooping family ! But this same son of our's, this master Fierenfat, seems to me to behave strangely in the affair.

EUPHEMON.

How so !

G 4.

RON-

RONDON.

Puff'd up with his Presidentship, he makes love by weight and measure: a young fellow putting on the grey-beard, and dictating to us like a Cato, is, in my opinion, a mighty ridiculous animal; I would prefer a fool to a coxcomb at any time: in short, brother, he is too proud, and self-sufficient.

EUPHEMON.

And let me tell you, brother, you are a little too hasty.

RONDON.

I can't help it; 'tis my nature: I love truth, I love to hear it, and I love to speak it: I love now and then to reprove my son-in-law, to rate him for his coxcomical pedantic airs. To be sure, you acted like a wise father, to turn your eldest son out of doors; that gamester, that wild rake-helly profligate, to make room for this prudent younger brother; to place all your hopes on this promising youth, and buy a presidentship for him. O 'twas a wise act no doubt: but the moment he became Mr. President, by my troth, he was stuff'd up with vanity and impertinence: he goes like clock-work, walks and talks in time, and says he has a great deal more wit than I have; who, you know, brother, have a great deal more than you: he is—

EUPHE-

EUPHEMON.

Nay, nay, what a strange humour this is! must you always be——

RONDON.

Well, well, no matter; what does it signify? all these faults are nothing when people are rich: he is, as I was going to say, covetous, and every covetous man is wise: O'tis an excellent vice for a husband, a most delightful vice. Come, come, this very day he must be my son-in-law; Life shall be his: it only remains now, my dear sorrowful friend, that you make over all your goods and chattels, hereditary or acquired, present and future, to your son, only reserving to yourself a moderate income: let every thing be sign'd and seal'd as soon as possible, that this same young gentleman of your's may throw a good fortune into our laps, without which my daughter will most certainly look another way for a husband.

EUPHEMON.

I have promis'd you, Sir, and I will keep my word: yes, Fierensat shall have every thing I am possess'd of: the sad remainder of my unhappy life shall glide away silently in some distant retreat: but I cannot help wishing that one, for whom I design my all, was less eager to enjoy it: I have seen the mad debauchery of

one son, and now behold with concern the soul
of the other devoted to interest.

RONDON.

So much the better, man, so much the better.

EUPHEMON.

O my dear friend, I was born to be an un-
fortunate father.

RONDON.

Let me have none of your lamentation, your
sighs, and your groans : what ! do you want
your eldest hopeful to come back, that prodigal
spendthrift, to spoil all our pleasure at once,
and drop in like a trouble-feast on the day of
marriage ?

EUPHEMON.

No, no.

RONDON.

Wou'd you have him come, and swear the
house down ?

EUPHEMON.

No.

RONDON.

Beat you, and run away with my daughter,
with my dear Life ; my Life, who—

EUPHEMON.

Long may that charming maid be preserv'd
from such wicked fellows !

RON-

THE PRODIGAL.

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R O N D O N.

Do you want him to come again to plunder his father? Do you want to give him your estate?

EUPHEMON.

No, no : his brother shall have it all.

R O N D O N.

Ay! or my daughter will have none of him.

EUPHEMON.

To day he shall have Life, and all my fortune : his brother will have nothing of me but the anger of a father, whom he has grievously injured : he has deserved my hatred ; an unnatural boy!

R O N D O N.

Indeed you bore with him too long; the other at least has acted with discretion : but as for him, he was a profligate : my God, what a libertine ! Don't you remember, ha! ha! that was a droll trick enough, when he robb'd you of your cloaths, horses, linen, and moveables, to equip his little *Jourdain*, who left him the very next morning. Many a time have I laugh'd at that, I own.

EUPHEMON.

O! what pleasure can you find in repeating my misfortunes?

G 6

RQN-

RONDON.

And then his staking twenty rouleaus upon an ace; O dear! O dear!

EUPHEMON.

Have done with this.

RONDON.

Don't you remember, when he was to have been betroth'd to my little Life, in the face of the church, where he had hid himself, and upon whose account too?—the debauch'd rogue!

EUPHEMON.

Spare me the remembrance, good Rondon; of these unhappy circumstances, that only set his conduct in the worst light: am I not already unfortunate enough? I left my own house, the place of my nativity, on purpose to remove as far as possible from my thoughts the memory of a misfortune, which, whenever it recurs, distracts me. Your business led you to this place; we have enter'd into a connection with, and friendship for each other; let me entreat you, Rondon, make the proper use of it. You are always repeating truths of some kind or other; but let me tell you, truth is not always agreeable.

RONDON.

Well, well, it is agreed; I say no more; I ask pardon;

pardon ; but sure the devil was in you, when you knew his violent temper, to make a soldier of him.

EUPHEMON.

Again !

RONDON.

Forgive me, but really you ought—

EUPHEMON.

I know it : I know I ought to forget every thing but my youngest son, and his marriage : but tell me, sincerely, Rondon, think you he has been able to gain your daughter's heart ?

RONDON.

O no doubt of it : my girl is a girl of honour, and will be obedient to her father ! if I tell her she must fall in love, her little docile heart, which I can turn and wind just as I please, falls in love immediately, without any arguing about the matter : I know how to manage her, I warrant you.

EUPHEMON.

I have, notwithstanding, some doubts about her obedience in this affair, and am greatly mistaken if she answers your expectation : my eldest son had a place in her affections : I know how strong the first impressions of love are upon a tender heart ; they are not worn out in a day ; indeed, my friend, they are not.

R O N -

RONDON.

Nonsense, nonsense.

EUPHEMON.

Say what you please, that wild fellow knew how to be agreeable.

RONDON.

Not he indeed: he was nobody: a poor creature: no, no: never you fear that: after his behaviour to you, I bade my daughter never to think of him any more: therefore set your heart at rest. When I say no, who shall dare to say yes? But you shall see, here she comes.

S C E N E II.

EUPHEMON, RONDON, LISE, MARTHA.

RONDON.

Come hither, my dear: this day, my dear, is a grand holiday for you, I'm sure; for this day I intend to give you a husband: now tell me, my little Life, be he old or young, handsome or ugly, grave or gay, rich or poor, shall not you have the strongest desire to please him? have not you already an inclination for him! are not you in love with him?

LISE.

No, Sir.

RONDON.

How, gipsy—

EUPHE-

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EUPHEMON.

O ho! my liege: why your power is a little on the decline. What is become of your despotic authority!

RONDON.

Ha! how is this! what, after all I said to you, have you no passion for your future husband? no inclination? no—

LISE.

None in the least, Sir.

RONDON.

Don't you know your duty obliges you to give him your whole heart?

LISE.

No, Sir; I tell you, no. I know, Sir, how far a heart, obedient to the dictates of virtue, is oblig'd by the solemn tie of marriage. I know, Sir, it is a wife's duty to make herself as amiable as possible, and to endeavour to deserve a husband's tenderness; to make amends by goodness what she wants in beauty; abroad to be discreet and prudent; at home, affable and agreeable; but, as for love, 'tis quite another thing: it will not endure slavery: inclination can never be forc'd, therefore never attempt it: to my husband I shall yield up every thing—but my heart, and that he must deserve before he can possess it: depend upon it, that heart will ne-

ver

ver be taught to love by the command of a father ; no, nor be argued into it by reason, nor frighten'd into it by a lawyer.

EUPHEMON.

In my opinion, the girl talks sensibly, and I approve the justice of her argument : my son, I hope, will endeavour to make himself worthy of a heart so noble and generous.

RONDON.

Hold your tongue, you old doating flatterer, you corrupter of youth : without your encouragement, the girl would never have thought of prating to me in this ridiculous manner.

[To Life.

Hark ye, Miss, I have provided you a husband, perhaps he may have a little of the coxcomb, and take upon him rather too much ; but it is my business to correct my son-in-law, and your's to take him, such as he is : to love one another as well as you can, and obey me in every thing ; that's all you have to do. And now, brother, let us go sign and seal with my scrivener, who will give us a hundred words where four would be sufficient : come, let us away, and rattle the old brawler : then will I come back, and scold my son, and your daughter, and yourself.

EUPHE-

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EUPHEMON.

Mighty well, sir: come along.

SCENE III.

LISE, MARTHA.

MARTHA.

My god! what an odd mixture it is! how strangely the old gentleman jumbles his ideas together!

LISE.

I am his daughter still; and his odd humours, after all, don't alter the goodness of his heart. Under this violence of passion, and air of resentment, he has still the soul of a father; nay, sometimes, even in the midst of his freaks, and whilst he is scolding me, he will take my advice: to be sure, when he finds fault with the husband he has provided for me, and tells me of the hazard I run in such a marriage, he is but too much in the right: but when, at the same time, he lays his commands on me to love him, then indeed he is most miserably wrong.

MARTHA.

How is it possible you should ever love this Mons. Fierenfat? I'd sooner marry an old soldier, that swears, gets drunk, beats his wife, and yet loves her, than a coxcomb of the long robe, fond of nobody but himself; who, with
a grave

a grave tone and pedantic air, talks to his wife as if he was examining her in a court of justice; a peacock that's always looking at his own tail, who bridles under his band, and admires himself; a wretch who has even more covetousness than pride, and makes love to you as he counts out his money.

LISE.

Thou hast painted him to the life; but what can I do? I must submit to this marriage: we are not the disposers of our own fate: my parents, my fortune, my age, all conspire to force me into the bonds of wedlock. This Fierensat, in spite of my dislike of him, is the only man here who can be my husband: he is the son of my father's friend, and I can't possibly shake him off. Alas! how few hearts are bestow'd according to our own inclinations! I must yield: time and patience perhaps may conquer my disgust of him; I may reconcile myself to the yoke, and come at last to pass over his faults as I do my own.

MARTHA.

Mighty well resolv'd indeed, my beautiful and discreet mistress; but your heart, I am afraid, is not quite so open.—O if I dar'd—but you have forbade me ever mentioning—

LISE.

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LISE.

Whom?

MARTHA.

Euphemon, who, spite of all his vices, I know, had once an int'rest in your heart; who lov'd you.

LISE.

O never, never: mention no more a name which I detest.

MARTHA.

[Going off.

Well, well, I say no more about him.

LISE.

[Pulling her back.

It is true, his youth did for a little time betray me into a tendernefs for him; but was he form'd to make a virtuous woman happy?

MARTHA.

[Going.

A dangerous fool indeed, madam.

LISE.

[Pulling her back.

He met with too many corrupters to lead him astray, unhappy youth! he took his round of pleasures, but knew little, I believe, of love.

MARTHA.

And yet there was a time when you seem'd to think you had caught him in the toils.

LISE.

L I S E.

If he had really lov'd, it might have reform'd him ; for, believe me, a real passion without disguise, is the best curb on vice ; and he who feels it, either is a worthy man, or soon will be so : but Euphemon despis'd his mistress, left love and tenderness for folly and debauchery. Those worthless villains, who pretended to be his friends, and drew him into the snare, after having exhausted all his mother's fortune, robb'd his unhappy father, and laid it upon him : to complete his misery, those vile seducers took him away from his father's protection, and snatch'd him from me : hid him forever from these eyes, which, bath'd in tears, still lament his vices and his charms. I think no more about him.

M A R T H A.

His brother, it seems, succeeds to his fortunes, and is to marry you ; more's the pity, I say : t'other had a fine face, fair hair, a good leg, danc'd well, sung well, in short, was born for love.

L I S E.

What are you talking of ?

M A R T H A.

Even in the midst of all his freaks and follies, all his strange conduct, one might see a fund of honour in his heart.

L I S E.

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LISE.

There was ; he seem'd form'd for virtue.

MARTHA.

Don't think, madam, I mean to flatter him :
but, to do him justice, he was not mean, nor
servile ; no railer, no sharper, no lier.

LISE.

No, but—

MARTHA.

Away : here comes his brother.

LISE.

Nay : we must stay now, it is too late to get off.

SCENE IV.

LISE, MARTHA, FIERENFAT the President.

FIERENFAT.

To be sure, madam, this augmentation of fortune must make the match more agreeable : increase of riches is increase of happiness, and, as I may say, the very soul of house-keeping : fortune, honour, and dignity, will not be wanting to the wife of Mons. Fierenfat. At Cognac, madam, you will have the precedence of the first ladies of the beau-monde ; let me tell you, madam, no little satisfaction ; you will hear them whispering as you go along, there she goes, madame la Presidente : really, madam, when
I re-

THE PRODIGAL.

I reflect upon my rank, my riches, the privileges of my high office, and all the good qualities I possess, altogether with my right of eldership, which will be made over to me, I assure you, madam, I pay you no small compliment.

MARTHA.

Now, for my part, I am of another opinion: always to be talking of your quality, your rank, and your riches, is extremely ridiculous: a Midas and Narcissus at once, blown up with pride, and contracted with avarice; always looking at yourself and your money; a petit-maitre with a band on; the most unnatural of all human creatures: a young coxcomb may pass off, but a young miser is—a monster.

FIERENFAT.

I believe, sweet-heart, it is not you whom I am to marry to-day, but this lady; therefore, you will please, madam, to trouble your head no more about us; silence will become you best.

[Turning to Life.

You, madam, I hope, who in an hour or two are to be my wife, will, I hope, favour me so far as, before night, to dismiss this blustering body-guard of your's, who makes use of a chamber.

THE PRODIGAL. 143

chamber-maid's privilege to give a loose to her impertinence: but I wou'd have her know I am not a president for nothing, and may, perhaps, lock her up for her own good.

MARTHA. [To Lise.

Speak to him, madam, and defend me: if he locks me up, he may lock you up too, for aught I know.

LISE. [Aside.
I wish he does not, indeed.

MARTHA.
Speak to him then, and don't mutter.

LISE.
What can I say to him?

MARTHA.
Abuse him.

LISE.
No: I'll reason with him.

MARTHA.
That will never do, take my word for it; t'other's the better way.

SCENE VI.

RONDON to LISE, &c.

RONDON.
Upon my word, a pleasant affair this.

FIERENFAT.

What's the matter?

RON-

R O N D O N.

You shall hear. As I was tramping to your old gentleman with the parchments, I met him at the foot of this rock, talking with a traveller who had just lit out of a coach.

L I S E.

A young traveller?

R O N D O N.

No: a toothless old fellow leaning on a crutch. I observ'd them rubbing their grey beards against each other for some time, shrugging up their hump-backs, and sighing most piteously; then they turn'd up the whites of their eyes, and fell o'sniveling together: at last Euphemon, with a crabbed face, told me, he had met with a great calamity, that at least he must have time to weep before he cou'd sign the articles, and at that time cou'd not talk to any body.

F I E R E N F A T.

O! I must go myself and comfort him: you know I can manage him as I please; besides, the affair is really my own concern; but as soon as he sees me with the contract in my hand, he will sign immediately: time is precious, and my new right of eldership a matter of importance.

L I S E.

There is no hurry, sir, you need not be so impatient,

R O N -

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RONDON.

But I say he shall be in a hurry: all this is your doing, madam.

LISE.

How, Sir! mine!

RONDON.

Yes, your's madam. All the crosses and disappointments that make families unhappy, come from undutiful daughters.

LISE.

What have I done, sir, to disoblige you?

RONDON.

What have you done! turn'd every thing topsy-turvy; put us all in confusion: but I'll let these two wise-acres lay their heads together a little, and then marry you off in spite of their teeth; in spite of yourself too, if you provoke me.

END OF THE FIRST ACT.

ACT II. SCENE I.

LISE, MARTHA.

MARTHA.

I SEE this matrimony frightens you a little: this noise and bustle of preparation has something terrible in it.

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H

LISE.

LISE.

To say the truth, so it has; and the more I think on the weight of this yoke, the more this heart of mine trembles at it. Marriage, in my opinion, is the greatest good, or the greatest evil; there is no such thing as a medium in it: where hearts are united, where harmony of sentiment, taste, and humour strengthen the bonds of nature, where love forms the tie, and honour gives a sanction to it, it is surely the happiest state which mortals can enjoy. What pleasure must it be to own our passion publicly, to bear the name of the dear beloved object of our wishes! your house, your servants, your livery, every thing carrying with it some pleasing remembrance of the man we love; and then to see our children, those dear pledges of mutual affection, that form, as it were, another union: O! such a marriage is a heaven upon earth. But to make a vile contract, to sell our name, our fortune, and our liberty, and submit them to the will of an arbitrary tyrant, and be only his first slave, an upper servant in his family; to be eternally jarring, or running away from one another, the day without joy, and the night without love; to be always afraid of doing what we should not do; to give way to our own bad inclinations, or be continually opposing them;

to be under the necessity either of deceiving an imperious husband, or dragging out life in a languid state of troublesome duty and obedience; to mutter, and fret, and pine away with grief and discontent; O! such a marriage is the hell of this world.

MARTHA.

The young ladies of this age have certainly, they say, some little dæmon, some familiar, to inspire them! Why, what a deal of knowlege this girl has pick'd up in so short a time! the most expert, artful widow in Paris, that ever comforted herself with the thought of having bury'd three husbands, could not have talk'd more learnedly on this head than my young mistress here: but we must have a little eclaireissement, with regard to this marriage, which it seems is so mighty disgustful. You don't approve of *Monf. le Président*; pray how should you like his brother? Come, unriddle the mystery to me. Has not the elder brother supplanted the younger? Come, who do you love, or who do you hate? Tell me the truth at once, and speak honestly.

LISE.

I know nothing about it: I cannot, dare not tell you the cause of my dislike. Why would you search for a melancholy truth at the bottom

of a heart already but too deeply afflicted ? We can never see ourselves in the water, whilst the tempest is howling round us : no ; first let the storm be hush'd, the wind calm, and the surface smooth.

MARTHA.

Comparisons, madam, will never pass for argument : it is easy enough sometimes to see the bottom of a heart, it's clear enough : and if the passions are now and then a little tempestuous, a young lady of understanding can generally guess from what corner the wind blows that has rais'd the storm. She knows well enough——

LISE.

I tell you, I know nothing ; and I am resolv'd to shut my eyes, and see nothing. I would not wish to know whether I am still weak enough to retain a passion for a wretch whom I ought to abhor ; nor would I encrease my disgust for one man by regretting the charms of another. No : let the false Euphemon live happy, and content, if he can be so ; but let him not be disinherited ; never will I be so cruel and inhuman as to make myself his sister on purpose to ruin and destroy him. Now you know my heart ; search into it no farther, unless you mean to tear it in pieces.

SCENE

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SCENE II.

LISE, MARTHA, a SERVANT.

SERVANT.

Madam, the baroness of Croupillac waits below.

LISE.

Her visit astonishes me!

SERVANT.

She is just arriv'd from Angoulême, and comes to pay her respects to you.

LISE.

Upon what occasion?

MARTHA:

O, upon our marriage, no doubt.

LISE.

The very subject I would wish to avoid. Am I in a condition to listen to a heap of ridiculous compliments, a register of common-place cant and hypocrisy, that tires one to death; where common sense is murdered by the perpetual exercise of talking, without saying any thing? What a task have I to go through!

SCENE III.

LISE, Mad. CROUPILLAC, MARTHA.

MARTHA.

Here her ladyship comes.

H 3

LISE.

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LISE.

Ay, I see her but too well.

MARTHA.

They say she wants vastly to be marry'd, is apt to be a little quarrelsome, and almost in her dotage.

LISE.

Some chairs here. Madam, you will pardon me, if—

M. de CROUPILLAC.

O madam !

LISE.

Madam !

M. de CROUPILLAC.

I madam, must likewise beg—

LISE.

Pray be seated.

M. de CROUPILLAC. [Sitting down.

Upon my word, madam, I am quite confounded, and wish, from the bottom of my soul, it was in my power to—

LISE.

Madam !

M. de CROUPILLAC.

Yes, madam, I heartily wish I could steal your charms ; it makes me weep to see you so handsome.

LISE.

LISE.

Pray, madam, be comforted.

M. de CROUPILLAC.

No, madam, that's impossible. I see, my dear, you may have as many husbands as you please. I had one too, at least I thought so; only one, and that's a melancholy consideration; and trouble enough I had to get him too, and you are going to rob me of him. There is a time, madam, O dear! how soon that time comes about! when if a lover deserts us, we lose our all, and one is quite left alone: and let me tell you, madam, it is very cruel to take away all from one, that has little or nothing left.

LISE.

You must excuse me, madam, but I am really astonish'd both at your visit, and your conversation: what accident pray has afflicted you so? whom have you lost, or whom have I robb'd you of?

M. de CROUPILLAC.

My dear child, there are a great many wrinkled old fools, who fancy that, by the help of paint and a few false teeth, they can stop the course of time and pleasure, and fix wandering love; but, to my sorrow, I am a little

H 4

wiser:

wiser : I see too plainly that every thing is running away, and I can't bear it.

LISE.

I am sorry for it, madam, if it be so ; but I can't possibly make you young again.

M. de CROUPILLAC.

I know it ; but I have still some hopes : perhaps to restore my false one to me, might, in some measure, give me fresh youth and beauty.

LISE.

What false one do you mean ?

M. de CROUPILLAC.

My ungrateful, cruel, husband, whom I have run after so long ; and little worthy he is of all my care. The President, madam.

LISE.

The President !

M. de CROUPILLAC.

Yes, madam : when Croupillac was in her bloom, she would not have talk'd to Presidents ; their persons, their manners, their every thing, was my aversion : but as we grow old, we are not quite so difficult.

LISE.

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LISE.

And so, madam—

M. de CROUPILLAC.

And so, madam, in short, you have reduced me to a state of misery and despair.

LISE.

I, madam? how? by what means?

M. de CROUPILLAC.

I'll tell you. I liv'd, you must know, at Angoulême, and, as a widow, had the free disposal of my person: there, at that very time, was Fierenfat, a student, a President's 'prentice; you understand me: he ogled me for a long time, and took it into his head to be most villainously in love with me. Villainously, I say, most horrid and abominable; for what did he make love to? my money. I got some people to write to the old gentleman, who interested themselves too far in the affair, and talk'd to him in my name: he returned in answer, that he would—consider of it: so you see the thing was settled.

LISE.

O yes.

H 5

M. de

M. de CROUPILLAC.

For my part, I had no objection : his elder brother was at that time, so I was inform'd, engaged to you.

LISE.

[Aside.

Cruel remembrance !

M. de CROUPILLAC.

He was a foolish fellow, my dear ; but had then the honour to be in your good graces.

LISE.

[Sighing.

Ha ! ha !

M. de CROUPILLAC.

This silly fellow, my dear, as I was telling you, being quite out at elbows, kick'd out of doors by his father, and wandering about the wide world, dead, perhaps, by this time (you seem concern'd), my college-hero, my President, knowing extremely well that your fortune was, upon the whole, much better than mine, has thought fit to laugh at my disappointment, and go in quest of your superior—portion. But do you think, madam, to run in this manner from brother to brother, and engross a whole family to yourself ? I do here most solemnly enter my protest against it : I forbid the banns : I'll venture

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ture my whole estate, my dowry, and every thing ; in short, the cause shall be so managed, that you, his father, my children, all of us shall be dead, before ever it is put an end to.

LISE.

I assure you, madam, with the utmost sincerity, I am very sorry that my marriage should make you miserable : I am sure, however, you have no reason to be angry with me ; but I find we may make others jealous without being happy ourselves. Look no longer, madam, I beseech you, with an eye of envy on my condition ; he is a husband I shall not quarrel with you for.

M. de CROUPILLAC.

Not quarrel for him ?

LISE.

No : I'll give him up to you with all my heart.

M. de CROUPILLAC.

You have no taste then for his person ? you don't love him ?

LISE.

I see very few charms in matrimony, and none at all in a law-suit ; and so, madam—

H 6

SCENE

SCENE IV.

M. de CROUPILLAC, LISE, RONDON.

RONDON.

So, so, daughter, here's fine work; protests, declarations, and law-suits, enough to make one's hair stand an end. Ouns! shall Rondon be talk'd to thus? but I'll ferret them out, the impertinent rascals.

M. de CROUPILLAC.

Must I suffer more indignities! Hear me, Mr. Rondon.

RONDON.

What wou'd you have, Madam?

M. de CROUPILLAC.

Your son-in-law, is a false villain, a coxcomb of a new species, a gallant, and a miser, a widow-hunter, a fellow that loves nothing but money.

RONDON.

He's in the right of it.

M. de CROUPILLAC.

In my own house he has a thousand times vow'd eternal constancy to me,

RONDON

RONDON.

Promises of that kind, madam, are very seldom kept.

M. de CROUPILLAC.

And then to leave me so basely.

RONDON.

I believe I should have done the same.

M. de CROUPILLAC.

But I shall talk to his father in a proper manner.

RONDON.

I'd rather you wou'd talk to him than to me.

M. de CROUPILLAC.

'Tis a wicked thing, so it is ; and the whole sex will take my part, and cry out shame upon him.

RONDON.

They can't cry louder than yourself.

M. de CROUPILLAC.

I'll make the world know how they should treat a baroness.

RONDON.

I'll tell you how : laugh at her.

M. de

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M. de CROUPILLAC.

A husband, look ye, I must have ; and I will take him, or his old father, or you.

RONDON.

Me ?

M. de CROUPILLAC.

Yes, you.

RONDON.

I defy you.

M. de CROUPILLAC.

We'll try it : I'll go to law with you.

RONDON.

Ridiculous.

S C E N E V.

RONDON, FIERENFAT, LISE.

RONDON.

[To Lise.

Pray, madam, what's the reason you receive such visitors in my house ? you are always bringing me into some scrape or other.

[To Fierenfat.

And you, sir, you Mr. King of Pedants, what nonsensical dæmon inspired you with the thought of courting a baroness, only to laugh at and abuse her ? A pretty scheme, indeed, with that
flat

flat face of your's, to give yourself the airs of a flighty young coxcomb ; with that grave, sorrowful countenance to play the gallant : it might have become the rake your brother ; but for you—fy ! fy !

FIERENFAT.

My dear father-in-law, don't be misled : I never was desirous of this match ; I only promis'd her conditionally, and always reserved to myself the right of taking a richer wife, if I cou'd get one : the disinheriting my elder brother, and coming into immediate possession of his fortune, have given me pretensions to your daughter : come, come, money makes the best matches.

R O N D O N.

So it does, my boy ; there you're in the right.

L I S E.

Now that right I take to be quite wrong.

R O N D O N.

Psha ! psha ! money does every thing, that's certain ; let us therefore settle the affair immediately : sixty good sacks full of French crowns will set every thing right, in spite of all the Croupillacs in the universe. How this Euphemon makes me wait ! I'm out of all patience ; but let us sign before he comes.

L I S E.

LISE.

No, fir, there I enter my caveat: I will only submit on certain conditions.

RONDON.

Conditions! impertinence! you pretend to say—

LISE.

I say, fir, what I think: can we ever taste, can we enjoy that guilty happiness, which springs from another's misery? and you, fir, [*to Fierenfat*] can you in your prosperity forget that you have a brother?

FIERENFAT.

A brother? I never saw him in my life: he was gone from home when I was at college, hard at my Cujatius and Bartole. I've heard, indeed, of his pranks since! and if he ever comes back again, we know what we have to do, never fear that; we shall send him off to the gallies.

LISE.

A brotherly and a Christian resolution! In the mean time you'll confiscate his estate; that, I suppose, is your intention: but I tell you, fir, I detest and abhor the project.

RON-

RONDON.

Heigh ! heigh ! very fine : but come, my dear, the contract is drawn, and the lawyer has taken care of all that.

FIERENFAT.

Our forefathers have determin'd concerning this matter ; consult the written law : let me see, in Cujatius, chapter the fifth, sixth, and seventh, we read thus : “ Every debauch'd libertine that leaves his father's house, or pillages the same, shall, *ipso facto*, be dispossess'd of every thing, and disinherited as a bastard.”

LISE.

I know nothing about laws or precedents, nor have ever read Cujatius ; but will venture to pronounce, that they are a set of vile unfeeling wretches, foes to common sense, and without humanity, who say a brother should let a brother perish : nature and honour have their rights to plead, that are more powerful than Cujatius and all your laws.

RONDON.

Come, come, let's have none of your codes, and your honour, and your nonsense ; but do as
I'd

I'd have you: what's all this fuss about an elder brother? there shou'd be money.

L I S E.

There shou'd be virtue, sir: let him be punish'd; but leave him at least something to subsist on, the poor remains of an elder brother's right: in a word, sir, I must tell you, my hand shall never be purchased at the price of his ruin: blot out therefore that article in the contract which I abhor, and which would be a disgrace to us all; if lucrative views induced you to draw it up thus, it is a shame and a dishonour to us, and therefore I desire it may be expunged.

FIERENFAT.

How very little women know of business!

R O N D O N.

What! you want to correct two attornies at law, and make a contract void: O lud! O lud!

L I S E.

Why not?

R O N D O N.

You'll never make a good housewife; you'll let every thing go to rack and ruin.

L I S E.

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LISE.

At present, fir, I cannot boast my knowlege of the world, or of œconomy ; but I will maintain it, the love of money destroys more families than it supports ; and if ever I have a house of my own, the foundation of it shall be laid on—justice.

RONDON.

She is light-headed ; but let us humour her a little : come, give him a little matter, and the business will be over.

FIERENFAT.

Ay, ay, well—I give to my brother—ay, I give him—come along.

RONDON.

Not a single farthing.

S C E N E VI.

EUPHEMON, RONDON, LISE, FIERENFAT.

RONDON.

O here comes the old gentleman. Well, I have brought my daughter to reason ; we want nothing now but your hand to the contract. Come, come, let's have no more delays, chear
up,

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up, put on your jovial countenance, your wedding looks, man; for in nine months time, I'll lay my life, two thumping boys—come, come, let us laugh and sing, and cast away care: sign, my boy, sign.

EUPHEMON.

I can't, sir.

FIERENFAT.

You can't?

RONDON.

Ay, here's another now!

FIERENFAT.

For what reason, pray?

RONDON.

What is all this madness? Are all the world turn'd fools? Every body says, no. Why how is this? what's the meaning of it?

EUPHEMON.

To sign the contract at a time like this, wou'd be flying in the face of nature.

RONDON.

What! is my lady Croupillac at the bottom of all this?

EUPHE-

EUPHEMON.

No : she's a fool, and wants to break off the match for her own sake ; 'tis not from her ridiculous noise that my uneasiness arises, I assure you.

RONDON.

Whence comes it then ? Did that fellow out of the coach put it into your head ? Are we indebted to him for all this ?

EUPHEMON.

What he told me must at least retard our happy marriage, which we were so eager upon.

LISE.

What did he tell you, sir.

FIERENFAT.

Ay, sir, what news did he bring ?

EUPHEMON.

News that shock'd me : at Bordeaux this man saw my son, naked, friendless, and in prison, dying with hunger ; shame and sickness leading him to the grave : sickness and misfortunes had blasted the flower of his youth ; and an obstinate fever, that had poison'd his blood, seem'd to threaten that his last hour was not far off. When he saw him, he was then
just

just expiring ; alas ! perhaps by this time he is no more.

R O N D O N.

Then his pension's paid.

L I S E.

Dead ?

R O N D O N.

Don't be frighten'd, child, what is it to you ?

F I E R E N F A T.

Ha ! the blood hath forsaken her cheeks ; she looks pale as death.

R O N D O N.

The jade has a little too much sensibility about her, that's the truth of it : but as he's dead, I forgive thee.

F I E R E N F A T.

But after all, sir, do you mean—

E U P H E M O N.

Don't be afraid ; you shall have her ; it is my desire you shou'd : but to chuse a day of mourning for a wedding-day wou'd be highly unbecoming. How wou'd my grief interrupt your mirth ! how wou'd your chaplets fade when wetted with a father's tears ? No, my son, you must put off your happiness, and give me

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me one day to indulge my sorrow: joy so ill timed as this wou'd be an affront to decency.

L I S E.

No doubt it wou'd: for my part, I had much rather share with you in your affliction, than think of marriage.

F I E R E N F A T.

Nay, but, my dear father—

R O N D O N.

Why, you're an old fool: what! put off a wedding, that has been the Lord knows how long upon the anvil, for an ungrateful young dog, who has been a hundred times disinherited: a p—x on you and your whole family.

E U P H E M O N.

At such a time a father must still be a father; his errors, his vices, and his crimes always made me unhappy; and it hurts me still more to think that he is dead without ever repenting of them.

E U P H E M O N.

Well, well, we'll make that matter easy: ha! boy, let us give him some grand-sons to make him

him amends : come, come, sign, and let's have a dance : what nonsense this is !

EUPHEMON.

But, fir—

RONDON.

But—Ouns ! this makes me mad ; to be sorry for the luckiest accident that cou'd happen, ridiculous ! Sorrow is good for nothing at the best ; but to whimper and whine, because you have got rid of a burthen, intolerable absurdity ? This eldest son, this scourge of your's, to my knowlege, two or three times had like to have broke your heart ; sooner or latter he wou'd have brought you to the grave ; therefore pr'ythee, man, take my advice, and make yourself easy ; the loss of such a son is the greatest gain.

EUPHEMON.

True, my friend ; but it is a gain that costs me more than you think : alas ! I lament that he died, and I lament that ever he was born.

RONDON. To Fierenfat,

Away, follow the old gentleman, and be as expeditious as you can ; the dead, you see, has got hold of the living ; so take the contract, I'll not be hag-
led

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led with any longer ; take his hand, and make him sign. For you, madam, [*To Life*] we shall expect you to-night ; every thing will go well, I warrant you.

LISE.

I'm in the utmost despair.

END of the SECOND ACT.

ACT III. SCENE I.

EUPHEMON the Son, JASMIN.

JASMIN.

I HAVE serv'd you, sir, now two years, without knowing who or what you are : you were then my master ; permit me now to call you my friend. You are now, like myself, thrown upon the wide world, and poverty has put us on a level : you are no longer a man of pleasure, the gallant and gay Euphemon, treated and caress'd by the men, surrounded and courted by the women. Every stiver you had is gone to the devil, and you have nothing now to do but to forget you was ever worth a shilling ;

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I

for

for surely the most insupportable of all evils is the remembrance of happiness, which we no longer enjoy: for my part, I was always plain Jasmin, and therefore the less to be pitied: born as I was to suffer, I suffer contentedly; to be in want of every thing is only natural to me; your old hat there, for instance, and coarse ragged waistcoat, was my usual garb; and you have great reason to be sorry that you had not always been as poor as myself.

EUPHEMON.

How shame and ignominy attended upon misfortune! how melancholy a consideration is it to reflect, that a servant shall have it in his power to humble me! and what's worse, I feel that he's in the right too. He endeavours to comfort me, after his manner! he keeps me company; and his heart, rough and unpolish'd as it is, is sensible, tender, and humane: born my equal (for as a fellow-creature so he was), he tries to support me under my affliction, and follows my unhappy fortune, whilst every friend I had, abandons me.

JASMIN.

Friends, did you say, sir? Pray, my good master, who are they? how are those people made whom they call friends?

EUPHE-

EUPHEMON.

You have seen them, Jasmin, coming into my house whenever they pleas'd, troubling me for ever with their importunate visits; a croud of parasites, who liv'd upon my bounty, complimented my fine taste, my elegance, my delicacy; borrow'd my money, then prais'd me before my face, and stunn'd me with their ridiculous flattery.

JASMIN.

Ay, poor devil! you did not hear them laughing at you as they went away, and making a joke of your foolish generosity.

EUPHEMON.

I believe it; for in the beginning of my misfortunes, when I was arrested at Bordeaux, not one of those, on whom I had lavished my all, ever came near me, or offer'd me his purse; and when I got out, sick and friendless, I apply'd to one of them in this poor ragged condition, and almost famish'd, for a little charitable assistance to lengthen out my wretched life; he turn'd away his unrelenting eye, pretended even to know nothing of me, and turn'd me out like a common beggar.

JASMIN.

Not one to comfort or support you?

EUPHEMON.

Not one.

JASMIN.

Such wretches! friends indeed!

EUPHEMON.

Men are made of iron.

JASMIN.

And women too.

EUPHEMON.

Alas! from them I expected more tenderness; but a thousand times met even with greater inhumanity: one of them in particular I well remember, who openly avowed her passion for me, and seemed to take a pride in obliging me; and yet in the very lodgings which she had furnished at my expence, and with the money I had squandered upon her, did she procure every day new gallants, and treat them with my wine, whilst I was perishing with hunger in the street: in short, Jasmin, if it had not been for the old man who pick'd me up by chance at Bourdeaux, and who, he said,
knew

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knew me when I was a child, death had by this time put an end to my misfortune : but know'st thou, Jasmin, whereabouts we are ?

JASMIN.

Near Cognac, if I am not mistaken ; where, they tell me, my old master Rondon lives.

EUPHEMON.

Rondon ? the father of—who did you say ?

JASMIN.

Rondon, a blunt odd fellow ; I had the honour of belonging to his kitchen once ; but, being always of a roving disposition, chose to travel ; and after that was an errand boy, lacquey, a clerk, a foot-soldier, and a deserter ; at length in Bourdeaux you took me into your service. Rondon perhaps may recollect me : who knows but in our adversity—

EUPHEMON.

How long is it since you left him ?

JASMIN.

About fifteen years. He was a character ; half pleasant, and half surly ; but at the bottom a good honest fellow. He had a child, I remember, an only daughter, a perfect jewel ;

13

blue

blue eyes, short nose, fresh complexion, vermilion lips; and then for sense and understanding, quite a miracle. When I liv'd there, she was, let me see, about six or seven years old; by my troth a sweet flower, and by this time fit to be gather'd.

EUPHEMON.

O misery!

JASMIN.

But why should I talk to you about her? it can be of no service to you; I see you are concern'd, and the tears trickle down your cheeks: my poor master!

EUPHEMON.

What unhappy fate cou'd guide me to this place! O me!

JASMIN.

You seem in deep contemplation, and as if the sight of this place made you unhappy: you weep too.

EUPHEMON.

I have reason.

JASMIN.

Do you know Rondon? Are you any way related to the family?

EUPHEMON.

O! let me alone, let me alone.

JAS-

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JASMIN. [Embracing him.

For pity's sake, my dear master, my friend, tell me who you are.

EUPHEMON. [In tears.

I am—I am a poor unhappy wretch, a fool, a madman, a guilty abandon'd criminal, whom heaven shou'd punish, and earth detest : wou'd I were dead !

JASMIN.

No : we must live. What, die with famine whilst we can help ourselves ! we have our hands at least, let us make use of them, and leave off complaining : look on those fellows yonder, who have no fortune but their industry, with their spades in their hands, turning up the garden ; let us join them : come, work, man, and get your livelihood.

EUPHEMON.

Alas ! those poor beings, mean as they are, and approaching nearer to animal than human nature, even they taste more pleasure and satisfaction in their labours, than my false delicacy and idle follies cou'd ever afford me ; they live, at least, free from trouble and remorse, and enjoy health of body, and peace of mind.

I 4

SCENE

S C E N E II.

M. de CROUPILLAC, Young EUPHEMON,
JASMIN.

M. de CROUPILLAC.

What do I see? or do my eyes deceive me? the more I look on him, the more I think it must be he. [*She looks stedfastly on him.*] And yet sure it cannot be the same; it can never be that gallant 'squire of Angoulême, that play'd so high, and seem'd to be lined with gold: it is he: [*She comes forward*] but the other was rich and happy, handsome and well-made; this fellow looks poor and ugly. Sicknefs will spoil the finest face, and poverty makes a still more dreadful alteration.

JASMIN.

What female apparition is this that haunts us with her malignant aspect?

EUPHEMON.

If I am not mistaken, I know her well enough; she has seen me in all my pomp and splendor: how dreadful it is to appear mean and destitute in the eyes of those who have seen us in affluence and prosperity! let us be gone.

M. de

THE PRODIGAL. 179

M. de CROUPILLAC. [Coming up to Euphemon.

What strange accident, my dear child, hath reduced thee to this pitiful plight ?

EUPHEMON.

My own folly.

M. de CROUPILLAC.

Why, what a figure dost thou make !

EUPHEMON.

Ay, madam, the consequence of having good friends ; of being robb'd, and plunder'd.

M. de CROUPILLAC.

Plunder'd ? by whom ? how ? when ? where ?

JASMIN.

O, from mere goodness of heart : our thieves were mighty honest creatures, persons that figur'd in the beau monde, amiable triflers, gamesters, bottle-companions, agreeable story-tellers, men of wit, and women of beauty.

M. de CROUPILLAC.

I understand you : you have squander'd away all you had in eating and drinking : but you will think this nothing when you come to know

distresses I have undergone, and the losses I have suffer'd with regard to—matrimony.

EUPHEMON.

Your humble servant, madam.

M. de CROUPILLAC. [Stopping him.

Your servant, indeed ! no, no, positively you shall stay, and hear my misfortunes ; you shall be sorry for me.

EUPHEMON.

Well, well, I am sorry for you ; good by to you.

M. de CROUPILLAC.

Nay, now I vow and swear you shall hear the whole story. One Mons. Fierenfat, a lawyer by profession, got acquainted with me at Angoulême, about [*She runs after him*] the time when you beat the four bailiffs, and run away : this Mons. Fierenfat, you must know, lives not far from hence, with his father Euphemon.

EUPHEMON. [Coming back.
Euphemon !

M. de CROUPILLAC.

Yes.

EUPHEMON.

For heaven's sake, madam, that Euphemon, mean you, so celebrated for his virtues, the honour of his race, cou'd he—

M. de

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M. de CROUPILLAC.

Yes, sir.

EUPHEMON.

And does he live here?

M. de CROUPILLAC.

He does.

EUPHEMON.

And may I ask you, madam, how he is? how does he?

M. de CROUPILLAC.

Very well, I believe, sir: what the duce ails him?

EUPHEMON.

And pray, madam, what do they say—

M. de CROUPILLAC.

Of whom, sir?

EUPHEMON.

Of an eldest son he had formerly.

M. de CROUPILLAC.

O, an ill-begotten rogue, a rake, a rattle-pate, an arrant sot, a madman, a fellow given up to every vice; hang'd, I suppose, by this time.

EUPHEMON.

Indeed, madam—but I am ashamed of interrupting you in this manner.

M. de CROUPILLAC.

To proceed then : this Monf. Fierenfat, as I was telling you, his younger brother, made ftrong love to me, and was to have been marry'd to me.

EUPHEMON.

And is he fo happy ? have you got him ?

M. de CROUPILLAC.

No : wou'd you think it, fir ? this fool puff'd up with the thoughts of ftepping into all his mad brother's fortune, growing rich, and wanting to be more fo, breaks off this match, which would have been fo honourable to him, and now wants to lay hold of the daughter of one Rondon, a vulgar cit, the cock of the vil- lage here.

EUPHEMON.

Going to marry her, fay you ?

M. de CROUPILLAC.

And here am I moft dreadfully jealous of her.

EUPHEMON.

That beautiful creature—Jafmin here was juft now giving me a picture of her : wou'd fhe throw herfelf away.—

JASMIN.

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JASMIN. [Aside to Euphemon.

What are you about, sir ? this husband is as good as another for her, I think : but my master's a strange man, every thing afflicts him.

EUPHEMON. [Aside.

This is beyond all bearing.

[Aloud to M. de Croupillac,

My heart, madam, is deeply sensible of the injury you have receiv'd ; this Life should never be his, if I could prevent it.

M. de CROUPILLAC.

You take it rightly, sir ; you lament my unhappy fate ; the poor are always compassionate ; you had not half the good-nature when you roll'd in money ; but mind what I have to say, in this life we may always help one another.

JASMIN.

Help us then, dear madam, I beseech you.

M. de CROUPILLAC.

You must act for me in this affair.

EUPHEMON.

I, madam ! how is it possible for me to serve you.

M. de

M. de CROUPILLAC.

O, a thousand ways ! you shall take my cause in hand : another dress, and a little finery, will make you still look tolerably handsome : you have a polite insinuating address, and know how to wheedle a young girl : introduce yourself into the family, play the flatterer with Fierrenfat, compliment him on his riches, his wit, his dress, every thing about him, get into his good graces, and whilst I enter my protest against the unlawful procedure, you will do all the rest ; by this means I shall at least gain time.

EUPHEMON. [Seeing his father at a distance.

What do I see ? O heaven !

He runs off.

M. de CROUPILLAC.

Hai ! hai ! the fellow's mad sure.

JASMIN.

He's afraid of you, ma'am, that's all.

M. de CROUPILLAC.

A blockhead ! here, you, stop, hark ye, hark ye. I must follow him.

SCENE

S C E N E III.

OLD EUPHEMON, JASMIN.

EUPHEMON.

Even the imperfect glance I had of that poor wretch, whoever he is, has, I know not why, fill'd my heart with anguish and disquietude: he had a noble air, and a turn of features, that some how or other affected me: alas! I never see a poor creature of that age, but the sad image of my unhappy son recurs to me; I have still a father's tenderness for him: but he is dead, or only lives with infamy to disgrace me. Both my children make me miserable: one by his vice and debauchery is my eternal punishment, whilst the other abuses my indulgence, and knows but too well that he is the only support of my old age: life is a burden to me, and I must soon sink beneath it. Who art thou, friend?

[Perceiving Jasmin, who bows to him.]

JASMIN.

Honour'd sir, noble and generous Euphemon, don't you remember poor Jasmin, sir, who liv'd with Rondon?

EUPHEMON.

Ah, Jasmin, is it you? time alters our faces, as you see by mine: when you liv'd here I had
a good

a good fresh complexion, was hearty and well ; but age comes on, my time is almost over. And so, Jasmin, you are come back to your own country at last ?

J A S M I N.

Yes, sir : I grew weary of such a fatiguing life, of rambling about like a wandering Jew, so I e'en came home. Happiness is a fugitive being, I am sure it has been so to me. The devil took me out, I believe, led me a long walk, and now has brought me back again.

E U P H E M O N.

Well, I may assist you perhaps if you behave yourself well : but who was that other poor wretch you were talking with, he that ran off just now ?

J A S M I N.

A comrade of mine ; a poor wretch, half-starv'd like myself, without a farthing ; he's in search of employment as well as I.

E U P H E M O N.

Perhaps I may find some for you both : is he sober and sensible ?

J A S M I N.

He ought to be so : he has very good parts, I know ; can write, and read, understands arithmetic, draws a little, knows music : he was very well brought up.

E U P H E-

EUPHEMON.

If so, I have a place ready for him : as for you, Jasmin, my son shall hire you ; he is going to be marry'd, to-night perhaps : as his fortune is increas'd, he'll want more servants ; and one of his is going away too, and you may step into his place : to night I'll present you both ; you shall see him at my neighbour Rondon's ; I'll talk to him there about it : so fare thee well, Jasmin ; in the mean time, here's something for you to drink.

S C E N E IV.

JASMIN alone.

The good man ! blessings on him ! Cou'd I ever have thought, in this vile age, to have met with so good a heart ? His air, his demeanor, his benevolent soul, form together a speaking picture of the integrity of former ages.

S C E N E V.

Young EUPHEMON, JASMIN.

JASMIN. [Embracing him.]

Well I have got a place for you ; we are both to serve Euphemon.

EUPHEMON.

Ay ! Euphemon !

JAS-

JASMIN.

Yes, if you like it. You seem surpris'd : why are your eyes turned up in this manner, as if you were going to be exorcis'd ? what is the meaning of those deep sighs, that will not let you speak ?

EUPHEMON.

O, Jasmin, I can no longer contain myself ; tendernefs, pain, remorse, all press upon me.

JASMIN.

What ! has my lady there said any thing to you ? what has she told you ?

EUPHEMON.

She told me nothing.

JASMIN.

What's the matter then ?

EUPHEMON.

My heart will no longer suffer me to conceal it from you : in short, that Euphemon—

JASMIN.

Well, what of him ?

EUPHEMON.

O, he is—my father.

JAS-

JASMIN.

Your father, sir?

EUPHEMON.

Yes, Jasmin: I am that eldest son, that criminal, that unfortunate, who has ruin'd his unhappy family. O, how my heart flutter'd at the sight of him, and offer'd up its humble prayers! O, with what joy cou'd I have fall'n down at his feet!

JASMIN.

Thou, Ephemon's son! forgive me, sir, forgive my rude familiarity.

EUPHEMON.

O, Jasmin, think'st thou a heart oppress'd as mine is, can be offended?

JASMIN.

You are the son of a man whom all the world admires; a man of a million: to say the truth, the reputation of his son shews to no great advantage when placed near his father's?

EUPHEMON.

'Tis that which gives me most uneasiness, But tell me, what did my father say?

JAS-

JASMIN.

I told him, fir, we were two unfortunate youths, very poor, but well educated, and wou'd be glad to serve him : he lamented our fate, and consented to take us. This evening he will introduce you to his son, the President, who, it seems, is to marry Life ; that fortunate brother, to whom my old master Rondon is to be father-in-law.

EUPHEMON.

And now, Jasmin, I will unfold my heart to you : hear the history of my misfortunes, and think how wretched I must be, to draw upon myself, by a variety of follies, the just indignation of a beloved parent ; to be hated, despis'd, disinherited ; to feel all the horrors of beggary and want ; to see my fortune given to my younger brother, and forc'd after all in my state of ignominy, to serve the very man who has robb'd me of every thing : this is my fate, a fate I have but too well deserved. But wou'd you believe it, Jasmin, in the midst of all my calamities, dead as I am to pleasure, and dead to every hope, hated by the world, despis'd by all, and expecting nothing, I yet dare to be—jealous.

JASMIN.

Jealous ! of whom ?

EUPHE-

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EUPHEMON.

Of my brother; of Life.

JASMIN.

So, you are in love with your sister! well, that's a stroke worthy of you; the only sin you had never yet committed.

EUPHEMON.

You are to know, Jasmin, (for I believe you had then left Rondon) that we were no sooner out of our infancy, than our parents promis'd us to each other: our hearts readily obey'd, and were united: the conformity of our ages, our taste, our manners, our situation, every thing conspir'd to strengthen the tie; like two young trees, we grew up together, and were to have join'd our branches: time, that heighten'd her charms, improv'd her tenderness, and love made her every day more lovely: the world at that blest time might have envied me; but I was young, foolish, and blind; link'd in with a set of wretches who seduc'd my innocence; intoxicated with folly and extravagance, I made a merit of despising her passion for me, nay even affronted her: O, I reflect on it with horror. The croud of vices, that rush'd in upon me, carry'd me away from my father and my friends: what was my fate after this I need not inform you.

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you. Every thing is gone ; and heaven, which tore me from her, has left me nothing but a heart to punish me.

JASMIN.

If so it be, and you really love her still notwithstanding all your distress, M. de Croupillac's advice was good, to insinuate yourself, if possible, into Rondon's family. Your purse is empty, and love may perhaps find means to fill it again.

EUPHEMON.

Cou'd I ever dare to look upon her, to come in her sight, after what I have done, and in this miserable condition ? No ; I must avoid a father and a mistress ; I have abused the goodness of them both, and know not (but it is too late to repent) which shou'd hate the most.

SCENE VI.

Young EUPHEMON, FIERENFAT, JASMIN.

JASMIN.

O here comes our wise President.

EUPHEMON.

Is it he ? I never saw his face before ; my brother and my rival !

FIEREN-

FIERENFAT.

Come, come, this does not go amiss. I have press'd, and rated the old gentleman in such a manner, that, I believe, we shall be able to finish the affair in spite of him. But where are these fellows who are to serve me?

JASMIN.

We are come, please your honour, to offer ourselves—

FIERENFAT.

Which of you two can read?

JASMIN.

He, sir.

FIERENFAT.

And write too, I suppose?

JASMIN.

O yes, sir, and cypher, and cast accounts.

FIERENFAT.

Ay, but he must know how to talk too.

JASMIN.

He's a little modest, sir, and but just recover'd from a fit of sickness.

FIEREN-

FIERENFAT.

He looks bold enough, I think, and as if he knew his own merit. Well, sir, what wages do you expect?

EUPHEMON.

None, sir.

JASMIN.

O, sir, we have a most heroic soul.

FIERENFAT.

Well, upon those conditions I take you into my service: come, I'll present you to my wife.

EUPHEMON.

Your wife, sir?

FIERENFAT.

Yes, I am going to be marry'd.

EUPHEMON.

When, pray?

FIERENFAT.

To-night.

EUPHEMON.

O, heav'n? pray, sir, forgive me, but are you deeply in love with her, sir?

FIERENFAT.

Certainly.

EUPHEMON.

Indeed?

FIERENFAT.

Yes.

EUPHE-

EUPHEMON.

And are you belov'd ?

FIERENFAT.

I hope so. A droll fellow, this ! You seem extremely curious, sir.

EUPHEMON. [Aside.

How I wish to contradict him, and punish him for his excess of happiness.

FIERENFAT. [To Jasmin.

What does he say ?

JASMIN.

He says, he wishes with all his heart he was like you, form'd to please.

FIERENFAT.

The ambition of the coxcomb ! but come, follow me : be diligent, sober, prudent, careful, clever, and respectful. What, ho ! la Fleur, la Brie, you rascals, where are you all ? follow me. [Exit.

EUPHEMON.

Now cou'd I like to salute him with two good boxes on the ear, to make that lawyer's face of his twinge again.

VOL. III.

K

JAS-

JASMIN.

I find, my friend, you are not mended much.

EUPHEMON.

I'm sure it is time to be so; and I assure you, I intend to be wiser for the future: from all my errors I shall at least reap this advantage, To know how to suffer.

END OF THE THIRD ACT.

ACT IV. SCENE I.

M. de CROUPILLAC, Young EUPHEMON,
JASMIN.

M. de CROUPILLAC.

I HAVE taken care, my friend, by way of precaution, to bring two serjeants from Angoulême; have you perform'd your part as well, and done as I desir'd you? Shall you be able, think you, to put on an air of consequence, and sow a little dissension in the family? Have you flatter'd the old gentleman? Have you look'd forward a little.

EUPHEMON.

No.

M. de

THE PRODIGAL.

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M. de CROUPILLAC.

How?

EUPHEMON.

Believe me, madam, I long to throw myself at her feet.

M. de CROUPILLAC.

Pray then make haste and do it; begin your attack as soon as possible, and restore my ungrateful seducer. I'll go to law for you, and you shall make love for me: cheer up, man, put on your best looks; assume that air of importance and self-sufficiency, which is sure to conquer every heart, which baffles wit, and triumphs over wisdom: to be happy in love, you must be bold; resume your wonted courage.

EUPHEMON.

O, I have lost it all.

M. de CROUPILLAC.

How so, man? what's the matter?

EUPHEMON.

I had courage enough when I was not in love; but at present—

JASMIN.

There may be other reasons why he shou'd be rather bashful; this Fierenfat, you must

K 2

know

know is our lord and master, and has taken us both into his service.

M. de CROUPILLAC.

So much the better ; a lucky circumstance : to be a domestic in your mistress's family, let me tell you, is a singular happiness : make your advantage of it.

JASMIN.

Yonder's something pretty, and coming this way too, to take the air, I suppose : she seems to come out of Rondon's house.

M. de CROUPILLAC,

'Tis she : come, my dear lover, make haste, now's your time : pluck up your courage, and speak to her ; what sighing and trembling, and pretend to love her too ? O, fy, fy !

EUPHEMON.

O, if you knew the situation of my heart, you wou'd not wonder at my trembling and confusion !

JASMIN. [Seeing Life at a distance.

Sweet creature ! how beautiful she looks !

EUPHEMON.

'Tis she : O, heav'n ! I die with love, with remorse, with jealousy, and despair.

M. de

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M. de CROUPILLAC.

Adieu : I will endeavour to return the obligation.

EUPHEMON.

All I ask of you is, if possible, to put off this cruel marriage.

M. de CROUPILLAC.

That's what I shall immediately set about.

EUPHEMON.

Alas ! I tremble.

JASMIN.

We must try to get her by herself ; let us retire a little.

EUPHEMON.

I'll follow you : I scarce know what I have done, or what I am going to do. I shall never be able to face her.

S C E N E II.

LISE, MARTHA, JASMIN at the farther end of the stage, and EUPHEMON behind him.

LISE.

In vain do I go in and out, backwards and forwards, endeavouring if possible, to hide myself from myself ; in vain do I seek for solitude, and examine my own heart : alas ! the more I look into it, the more am I convinc'd

K 3

that

that happiness was never made for me : If I do at any time enjoy a momentary comfort, it is from that old ridiculous creature Croupillac, and the thought of her preventing this detested match ; but then all my apprehensions return, when Fierenfat and my father urge it upon me with repeated importunities : they have gain'd over the good Euphemon.

MARTHA.

In troth, the old man is too good natur'd, and Fierenfat governs him most tyrannically.

LISE.

I pardon him, he's fond of an only child ; his eldest, poor man, gave him a great deal of uneasiness, and now he relies entirely upon the other.

MARTHA.

But, after all, madam, notwithstanding every thing that has been reported, it is not clear that the other is yet dead.

LISE.

Alas ! if dead, I must lament ; if living, I must hate him : cruel alternatives !

MARTHA.

The news of his danger, however, seem'd to have a powerful effect upon you.

LISE.

LISE.

One might be sorry for his misfortunes without loving him, you know.

MARTHA.

But one may as well be dead as not be lov'd: and so you are really to be marry'd to his brother?

LISE.

My dear child, I am distracted at the thought of it: you have long known my indifference for Fierenfat; it is now chang'd to horror and detestation: marriage with him is a potion most dreadfully bitter, which, in my present desperate case, I must swallow much against my will, I assure you; though my hand, at the same time, rejects it with horror and indignation.

JASMIN. [Pulling Martha by the sleeve.

Hark'ee, fair lady, will you give me leave to whisper a word or two in your ear?

MARTHA. [To Jasmin.

Most willingly, sir.

LISE.

[Aside.

O cruel fate! why did'st thou prolong a life, which an ungrateful guilty lover has made so truly miserable?

K 4

MAR-

MARTHA. [To Life.

One of the President's servants, madam, but just now hir'd to him; he says, he should be glad to speak to you.

LISE.

Let him wait.

MARTHA. [To Jasmin.

Friend, my lady desires you wou'd wait a little.

LISE.

Always teasing me thus! even when he is absent I can have no peace for him. O dear! how weary am I of this marriage already!

JASMIN. [To Martha.

My dear girl, procure us this favour, if you can.

MARTHA. [Coming back.

Madam, he says he must speak with you.

LISE.

So! I see I must go.

MARTHA.

There is a person, it seems, who is very desirous of seeing you; he must speak to you, he says, or die.

LISE.

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LISE.

I find I must go in and hide myself.

SCENE III.

LISE, MARTHA, Young EUPHEMON, leaning
on JASMIN.

EUPHEMON.

I can neither walk nor speak; my sight too
fails me.

JASMIN.

Give me your hand; we'll cross her as she
comes.

EUPHEMON.

O! I feel a deadly coldness at my heart [*to
Lise*] will you permit—

LISE. [Without looking at him.
What wou'd you, sir?

EUPHEMON. [Throwing himself on his knees.
What wou'd I? that death which I deserve.

LISE.

What do I see? O heav'n!

MARTHA.

Amazing! Euphemon! good God, how
chang'd!

K 5

EUPHE.

EUPHEMON.

Chang'd indeed : yes, Life, you are reveng'd of me. Well may you wonder, for I am chang'd in every thing : no longer do you behold in me that madman, that false wretch, so fear'd and detested here ; he who betray'd the cause of nature and of love. Young and thoughtless as I was, I fell a prey to every passion, and adopted every vice from my loose companions : but O ! the worst of all my crimes, which never can be blotted out, never atoned for, was my offending you : but here I swear, by thee, and by that virtue, which, though I have forsaken, I yet adore, I have found my error. Vice, though I admitted it, was a stranger to this heart, which is now no longer stain'd with those guilty blemishes that obscur'd its native lustre ; that pure, that sacred passion, which is still reserv'd for you, hath refin'd it ; that tender passion, and that alone, brought me hither, not to break off your new engagements, or oppose your happiness, that wou'd ill become a poor abandon'd wretch like me : but since the misfortunes which I so well deserv'd have brought me, even in the prime of life, to the brink of the grave, I cou'd not help seeking you, to be a witness of my last moments ; and happy, thrice happy shall I be,

I be, if he, who was once destin'd to be your husband, at length shall die, and not be hated by you.

LISE.

I am scarce myself: can it be Euphemon? can it be you? O heav'n! in what a condition too, and what a time is this: wretch as thou art, what cruel injuries has thou done to both of us!

EUPHEMON.

I know it: at sight of thee, every folly I have been guilty of appears double inexcusable: they were dreadful, and you know they were; that is some punishment, but not so much as I deserve.

LISE.

And is it true, unhappy man, that thou hast at last repented of thy follies; that your rebellious heart is at length subdued, and misfortune hath pointed out to you the road of virtue?

EUPHEMON.

Alas! what will it avail, that my eyes are open'd, when it is too late! In vain is that heart subdued, in vain is my return to virtue, since I have lost in you its best, its only valuable reward.

K 6

LISE.

LISE.

Yet, answer me, Euphemon ; may I believe you have indeed gain'd this glorious victory ? consult your own breast, and do not again deceive me : can you yet be prudent and virtuous ?

EUPHEMON.

I am so ; for still my heart adores you.

LISE.

And dost thou still love, Euphemon ?

EUPHEMON.

Do I love ? by that I live, that alone has supported me. I have borne every thing, even infamy itself ; and a thousand times I wou'd have put an end to my wretched life, but that still I lov'd it, because it belong'd to you : yes, to you I owe my present sentiments, my being, and that new life which now dawns upon me : to you I owe the return of my reason : with love like mine, wou'd to heav'n I may be able to preserve it ! O do not not hide from me that charming face : look at me : see how chang'd I am : see the cruel effect of care and sorrow : the roses of youth are wither'd by remorse and misery. There was a time when Euphemon wou'd not thus have affrighted you : do but look on me, 'tis all I ask,

LISE,

LISE.

If I see the thinking, the reform'd, the constant Euphemon, it is enough : in my eyes he is but too amiable.

EUPHEMON.

What says my Life ? gracious heav'n ! she weeps.

LISE. [To Martha.

O support me, my senses fail. Can I ever be the wife of Euphemon's brother ? but tell me,

[Turning to Euphemon.

Have you seen yet your father ?

EUPHEMON.

O ! I blush to appear before that good old man, whom I have so dishonour'd : hated as I am, and banish'd from his presence, I love and reverence, but dare not look upon him.

LISE.

What then is your design ?

EUPHEMON.

If heav'n shou'd graciously prolong my days, if you must be my brother's happy lot, I propose to change my name and profession, serve as a soldier, and seek for death in the field of honour ; perhaps success in arms may acquire me
some

some glory, and even you may hereafter shed a tear over the unhappy Euphemon. My honour at least will never suffer by the employment; Rose and Fabert set out as I shall do.

L I S E.

'Tis a noble resolution; and the heart that was capable of making it, must be above guilt and meanness: sentiments like these affect me much more even than the tears you shed at my feet. No, Euphemon, if I am left at liberty to dispose of myself, and can possibly avoid the hateful match propos'd for me, if it is in my power to determine your fate, you shall not go so far to change your condition.

E U P H E M O N.

O heav'n! and does thy gracious heart melt at my misfortunes?

L I S E.

They affected me most deeply; but your repentance hath secur'd me.

E U P H E M O N.

And will these dear eyes, that look'd on me so long with indignation, will they soften into love and tenderness? O thou hast reviv'd a flame in the breast of Euphemon, which his follies had almost extinguish'd. Fond as my brother is of riches, though my father has given him all that inheritance which nature had design'd

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sign'd for me, he still must envy my happiness. I am dear to you ; he alone, and not Euphemon, is disinherited. O I shall die with joy.

MARTHA.

Deuce on him, here he comes.

LISE.

Be upon your guard, Euphemon ; keep in those struggling sighs, and dissemble.

EUPHEMON.

Why should I, if you love me ?

LISE.

Consider my relations, consider your own father. Your brother saw us together, saw you at my feet ; and all that we can now do is, not to let him know who you are.

MARTHA.

I can't help laughing, to think what a passion his gravity will be in.

SCENE IV.

LISE, Young EUPHEMON, MARTHA, JASMIN, FIERENFAT at the farther end of the stage, Euphemon turning his back to him.

FIERENFAT.

Either some devil has impair'd these eyes of mine ; or, if I see clear, I most certainly beheld—O yes—it is so—it's all over with me.

[Coming

[Coming forwards towards Euphemon.
O it is you, sir, is it? traitor, rascal, forger!

EUPHEMON. [Enrag'd,
I, I cou'd—

JASMIN [Placing himself before them.
Sir, sir, this—this is an affair of importance that was going forward, and you interrupt it, sir; an affair of love, sir, tenderness, respect, gratitude, and virtue—for my part I'm distracted when I think of it.

FIERENFAT.
An affair of virtue! O yes, and kissing her hand too! call you that virtue! rascal, slave!

EUPHEMON.
O Jasmin, if I dar'd—

FIERENFAT.
No: this is a gallant indeed with a witness: had he been a gentleman; but a servant, a beggar—If I was to sue him in a court of justice, 'twou'd be only so much money flung away.

LISE. [To Euphemon.
Be calm; if you have any regard for me, I beg you will.

FIERENFAT.
The traitor; I'll have you hang'd, you dog.
[To Martha,
You laugh, mistress,

MAR:

THE PRODIGAL. 211

MARTHA.

I do, to be sure, sir.

FIERENFAT.

And why do you? what do you laugh at?

MARTHA.

Lord, sir, 'tis such a comical affair—

LISE.

You don't know, madam, the danger you are in: you little think, my good friend, what the law inflicts on such delinquents as you, and how often you may be—

MARTHA.

Pardon me, sir, I know it mighty well.

FIERENFAT. [To LISE.

You, madam, seem to be deaf to all this; faithless woman! with that air of innocence too, to play me such a trick: your inconstancy is a little premature on our very wedding-day, and just before we are marry'd: 'tis a wonderful mark of your chastity.

LISE.

Don't be in a passion, sir, nor lightly condemn innocence on bare appearances only.

FIERENFAT.

Innocence, indeed!

LISE.

LISE.

Yes, sir, when you know my sentiments, you will esteem me for them.

FIERENFAT.

You go an excellent way to gain esteem.

EUPHEMON.

This is too much.

LISE.

[To Euphemon.

What madness! for heaven's sake be calm, restrain—

EUPHEMON.

No: I will never suffer him to cast reproach on you.

FIERENFAT.

Do you know, madam, that you lose your jointure, your estate, your portion, every thing, as soon as—

EUPHEMON. [In a passion, putting his hand on his sword.

Do you know, sir, how to hold your tongue?

LISE.

O forbear.

EUPHEMON.

Come, come, Mr. President, lay aside your assuming airs, be a little less fierce and haughty; a little less of the judge, if you please: this lady has not yet the honour to be your wife, nor is she even your mistress, sir: what right have you to complain? your claim is void:
you

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you should have known how to please, before you had a right to be angry: such charms were never made for you, and therefore jealousy sits but ill upon you. You see she's kind, and forgives my warmth; it will become you, sir, to follow her example.

FIERENFAT. [In a posture of defence.

I'll bear no more: where are my servants? help here!

EUPHEMON.

How's this!

FIERENFAT.

Fetch me a constable here!

LISE. [To Euphemon.

Retire, I beseech you.

FIERENFAT.

I'll make you know, sir, the respect that's due to my rank and profession.

EUPHEMON.

Observe, sir, what you owe to this lady; as to myself, however things may now appear, the respect perhaps is due to me.

FIERENFAT.

You, sir, you?

EUPHEMON.

Yes, sir, me, me.

FIEREN-

FIERENFAT.

This is a pure impudent fellow : some lover, I suppose, in the disguise of a servant. Who are you, sir ? answer me.

EUPHEMON.

I know not who I am, nor what will be my fate : my rank, condition, fortune, happiness, my very being, all depends on her heart, her kind looks, and her propitious bounty.

FIERENFAT.

They may soon depend upon a court of justice, that I assure you. I'll go this instant, prepare my records, and hasten to sign the instrument. Begone, ungrateful woman, and dread my resentment ; I'll bring your relations, and your father ; then your innocence will appear in its proper light, and they will esteem you accordingly.

S C E N E V.

LISE, Young EUPHEMON, MARTHA.

LISE.

For heav'n's sake, conceal yourself ; let us go in immediately ; I tremble at the consequence of this. If your father should find out it was you, nothing will appease him : he will conclude that some new extravagance brought you
back

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back here on purpose to insult him, and to sow division between our families; and then you will be confin'd, perhaps, even without being so much as heard in your own defence.

MARTHA.

Let me conceal him, and I'll warrant they shan't easily find him out.

LISE.

Come, come, you must away; I must endeavour to reconcile your father: the return of nature shall, if possible, be the work of love: you must be conceal'd a while—take you care [To Martha] he does not appear: begone immediately.

SCENE VI.

RONDON, LISE.

RONDON.

Well, my Life, how is it; I was in search of you and your husband.

LISE.

Thank God! he is not so yet.

RONDON.

Where are you going?

LISE.

Decency, sir, at present obliges me to avoid you.

[She goes out.

RON-

RONDON.

This President is a dangerous man, I find: now should I like to be incog. in some place close to 'em, only to see how two lovers look when they are just going to be marry'd.

S C E N E VII.

FIERENFAT, RONDON, Constables, &c.

FIERENFAT.

Where are they, where are they? ha! gone; the subtle villains have escap'd me: where have the rascals hid themselves?

RONDON.

Your reverence seems out of breath; what are you in such a hurry about? who are you hunting after? what have they done to you?

FIERENFAT.

Made a cuckold of me, that's all.

RONDON.

Ha! ha! a cuckold! ha! how! what is all this?

FIERENFAT.

Yes, yes, my wife: heav'n preserve me from ever giving her that name? Yes, sir, a cuckold I am, in spite of all the laws in the kingdom.

RONDON.

My son-in-law!

FIEREN

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FIERENFAT.

Yes, my father-in-law, 'tis but too true.

RONDON.

Well, but the affair—

FIERENFAT.

Is clear as possible.

RONDON.

You try my patience too far.

FIERENFAT.

I am sure they have mine.

RONDON.

If I could believe—

FIERENFAT.

You may believe it all, sir, I assure you.

RONDON.

But the more I hear, the less I understand.

FIERENFAT.

And yet it's very easy to comprehend.

RONDON.

If I were once convinc'd of it, the world should be a witness of my resentment, I wou'd strangle her with my own hands.

FIEREN-

FIERENFAT.

Strangle her then by all means, for the thing is fairly prov'd.

RONDON.

Something, no doubt, is wrong, by my finding her here in that condition; she hung down her head, and cou'd scarce speak to me; seem'd frighten'd, and embarras'd too. Come, my son, let us in, and surprize her. This is a case of honour, and where that is concern'd, Rondon listens no longer to reason. Away.

End of the FOURTH ACT.

ACT V. SCENE I.

LISE, MARTHA.

LISE.

WHAT a desperate situation is mine! scarce can I believe myself safe even with you. Think what it must be for a soul so pure, so delicate, as mine, to suffer even for a moment such injurious suspicions. Euphemon, thou dear but fatal lover, thou wert born but to afflict me; thy absence was worse than death to me, and now thy return exposes me to infamy. [*Turning to Martha*] For heav'n's sake, take care of him, for they are making the strictest enquiry.

MAR-

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MARTHA.

O never fear; I shall put 'em to their trumps,
I warrant you; I defy all their search-warrants:
I have some certain little cunning holes in my
cabinet which these ferrets can never get at;
there, madam, your lover lies snug, safely con-
ceal'd from the inquisitive eyes of long-rob'd
pedants. I have led the hounds a pretty good
chace, and now the whole pack is at fault.

SCENE II.

LISE, MARTHA, JASMIN.

LISE.

Well, Jasmin, how stand our affairs?

JASMIN.

O I have pass'd my examination most glori-
ously, gone through it like an old offender,
grown grey in the profession, and answer'd eve-
ry question without fear or trembling. One of
them drawl'd out his words with all the solem-
nity of a pedagogue; another put on a haughty
air, and would have brow-beated me; a third, in
a pretty silver tone, cry'd out, Child, tell us the
truth: whilst I, with most laconic brevity, and
unalterable firmness, fairly routed the whole
group of pedants.

LISE.

They know nothing then?

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L

JASMIN.

JASMIN

Nothing: to-morrow perhaps they may know all: time, you know, brings every thing to light.

LISE.

I hope at least Fierenfat will not have time to prejudice his father against me. I have a thousand fears about it: I tremble for him, and for my own honour: in love alone I have plac'd my hopes, that will assist me—

MARTHA.

For my part, I'm in a sad quondary about it, and wish ev'ry thing mayn't go wrong: consider, madam, we have against us two old fathers, and a president, besides scolds and prudes innumerable: if you knew what haughty airs they give themselves, what a supercilious sneer, and severe tone, their proud virtue puts on upon this occasion, with what insolent acrimony they have persecuted your innocence, believe me, madam, their clamours, with their affected zeal, and most religious fury, wou'd raise your laughter, perhaps even make you tremble.

JASMIN.

I have travell'd, madam, and seen noise, and bustle enough, but never before was I witness to such a hubbub: the whole house is turn'd topsy-turvy:

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turvy: they are all knaves, fools, or madmen; whispering lies against you, and adding one untruth to another, telling the story a hundred different ways; the poor fiddlers are sent back without receiving a farthing, or a drop of drink; six tables prepar'd for the wedding feast, full of the finest delicacies, overset in the confusion; the people run backwards and forwards; the footmen drink and laugh; Rondon swears, and Fierenfat is employ'd in writing the case out.

L I S E.

And what does the worthy father of Euphemon do, amid'st all this bustle?

M A R T H A.

O, madam, in his dejected aspect we may read the sorrows of afflicted virtue; he lifts up his eyes to heaven, and cannot bring himself to believe that you have stain'd the honour of your spotless youth with so black a crime; he defends you to your friends by the strongest arguments; and when at length he is stagger'd by the proofs they bring against you, he sighs, and says, if you are guilty, he will never again depend on any mortal breathing.

L I S E.

The good old man, how his tenderness affects me.

M A R T H A.

Here comes another of a different kind, master Rondon: let us avoid him, madam.

L 2

L I S E.

LISE.

By no means : my heart is innocent, and shou'd
be afraid of nothing.

JASMIN.

But I am, I assure you.

S C E N E III.

LISE, MARTHA, RONDON.

RONDON.

O thou subtle gipsy, thou forward, thou unnatural girl ! O Life, Life ! But come, madam, I must know the bottom of this vile proceeding : how long have you been acquainted with this robber, this pirate ? Tell me his name, his rank, his profession ; how got he into your heart ? Whence comes he, and where is he ? Answer me, madam, answer me. You condemn me, madam, and laugh at my resentment : are not you asham'd ?

LISE.

No, sir.

RONDON.

Always No, No, to me : am I never to hear any thing but No ? It increases my suspicion : when I am injur'd, I expect at least to be treated with respect. I will be fear'd, madam, and obey'd too.

LISE.

LISE.

And so you shall, sir. I will discover every thing to you.

RONDON.

Well, that's saying something however : when I begin to threaten, people will mind me a little, and——

LISE.

I have only one favour to beg of you—that, before I say any thing to you, Euphemon will be so obliging as to let me speak a few words to him.

RONDON.

Euphemon ! why, what has he to do with it ? I think I am the properest person to be spoke to.

LISE.

My dear father, I have a secret to entrust to him : let me beg you, for the sake of your own honour, to send him to me : permit me—but I can tell you no more.

RONDON.

I must e'en yield to her request : she wants to explain herself to my good old friend, and I think I may safely trust her alone with him ; and then to nunnery with the little hussy immediately.

L 3

SCENE

THE PRODIGAL.

S C E N E IV.

LISE, MARTHA.

LISE.

O that I may be able to melt the good Euphemon! how my heart flutters and leaps within me! my life or death depends on this important moment. He comes. Hark'ee, Martha,
[Whispers here]

MARTHA.

I'll take care, madam.

S C E N E V.

OLD EUPHEMON.

LISE.

A chair here—pray, sir, be seated. Oh!
[sighs.] permit me sir, on my knees—

EUPHEMON. [Raising her up.]

You mean to affront me, madam.

LISE.

Far from it, sir; my heart esteems and reveres you; I have ever look'd on you as a father.

EUPHEMON.

Are you my daughter?

LISE.

LISE.

Yes, sir, I flatter myself I have not been unworthy of that name.

EUPHEMON.

After the unhappy affair, madam, that has broke off our connection, I must own—

LISE.

Be you my judge, sir, and look into my heart; that judge, I doubt not, will one day be my protector: but hear me, sir, I will speak my own sentiments, perhaps they may be yours also.

[She takes a chair and sits by him.

And now, sir, tell me; if your heart had for a long time been bound, by the purest and most tender regard, to an object, whose early years gave the fairest promise of all that is amiable, who every day advanc'd in beauty, merit, and accomplishments; if, after all, his easy and deluded youth gave way to inclination, and sacrificed duty, friendship, every thing, to unbridled licentiousness—

EUPHEMON.

Well, madam.

LISE.

If fatal experience shou'd teach him what false happiness he had so long pursued; shou'd teach

L 4

him

him that the vain objects of his search sprang but from error, and were follow'd by remorse! if at length, ashamed of his follies, his reason, instructed by misfortune, shou'd again light up his virtues, and give him a new heart; if, restor'd to his natural form, he shou'd become faithful, just, and honest, wou'd you, sir, cou'd you, then shut up that heart which once was open to receive him?

EUPHEMON.

What am I to conclude from this picture, or what has it to do with our affair, and the injury I have receiv'd from your conduct? The wretch who was seen at your feet is a young man, utterly unknown to every body here: the widow says indeed she remembers him six months at Angoulême: another tells me he is a hardy profligate, with a head full of dark intrigues, and every kind of debauchery; a character which doubles my astonishment: I shudder with horror at it.

LISE.

O, sir, when I have told you all, you will be much more astonished; for heaven's sake, hear me then: I know you have a noble and a generous heart, that never was form'd for cruelty; let me then ask you, was not your son Euphemon once most dear to you?

EUPHE-

EUPHEMON.

He was ; I own to you, he was ; and therefore it is that his ingratitude calls for a severer vengeance. I have wept his misfortunes, and his death ; but nature, in the midst of all my anguish, left my reason but the more sensible of my injuries, and more resolv'd to punish them.

LISE.

And cou'd you punish him forever ? cou'd you still be so unhappy, so miserable, as to hate him ? cou'd you throw from you a repenting child, an alter'd son, whose change wou'd bring back to you the image of yourself ? cou'd you repulse this son were he now in tears at your feet ?

EUPHEMON.

Alas ! you have forgot, you shou'd not thus open a wound that bleeds too fresh, and inflict new torments on me : my son is dead, or far from hence remains still harden'd in his follies. O if he had return'd to virtue, wou'd he not come and ask forgiveness of me ?

LISE.

Yes, and he will come to ask it ; you shall hear him, and hear him with compassion too ; indeed you shall.

L 5

EUPHE-

THE PRODIGAL.

EUPHEMON.

What say you?

LISE.

Yes, sir: if death has not already put an end to his shame and grief, you may perhaps see him dying at your feet, with excess of sorrow and repentance.

EUPHEMON.

You see too well how deeply I am affected : my son alive!

LISE.

If he yet lives, he lives to love and honour you.

EUPHEMON.

To love and honour me! impossible! how can I ever know it? from whom must I learn that?

LISE.

From his own heart.

EUPHEMON.

But, do you think—

LISE.

With regard to every thing I have said concerning him, you may depend on my veracity.

EUPHEMON.

Come, you have kept me in suspense too long; have pity on my declining years. Alas! I am
full

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full of hopes, and fears : I did indeed love my son, these tears speak for me : I lov'd him tenderly. O if he yet lives ! if he is return'd to virtue ! explain, I beseech you, speak to me, tell me all.

LISE.

I will : it is time now, and you shall be satisfy'd.

[She comes forward a little, and speaks to young Euphemon behind the scene.

Come forth.

SCENE VI.

Old EUPHEMON, Young EUPHEMON, LISE.

EUPHEMON.

Good heav'n ! what do I see ?

Young EUPHEMON. [Kneeling.

My father ! O, sir, know me, acknowlege me, decide my fate, for life or death depends upon a word.

Old EUPHEMON.

What cou'd bring you hither at this time ?

Young EUPHEMON.

Repentance, love, and nature.

LISE. [Kneeling with young Euphemon.

At your feet behold your children. Yes, sir, we have the same sentiments, the same heart.

L 6

Young

Young EUPHEMON. [Pointing to Life.

Alas ! her tender kindness has pardon'd all my offences : O, gracious sir, follow the example which love has set, and forgive your unhappy son : driv'n as I was to despair, all I hop'd for was to die belov'd by her and you ; and if I live, I will live to deserve it. You turn away from me ; what it is, sir, that transports you thus ! I see your heart is mov'd : is it with hatred ? is your wretched son condemn'd—

Old EUPHEMON.

[Raising up his son and embracing him.

'Tis love ; 'tis tenderness : I forgive thee ; if thou art restor'd to virtue, I am still thy father.

L I S E.

And I thy wife. O, sir, long since our hearts were united ; permit us at your feet to renew our vows : it is not your riches he asks of you, he brings you now a heart too pure for such a wish ; he wants nothing : if he is virtuous, I have enough for both, and he shall have it all.

SCENE

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SCENE VII.

To them RONDON, M. de CROUPILLAC, FIER-
ENFAT, Bailiff's Follower, Attendants.

FIERENFAT.

Yonder he is, talking to her still; let us shew
ourselves men of courage, and take him by sur-
prize.

RONDON.

Ay, let us be bold, we are fix to one.

LISE.

[To Rondon.]

Now, sir, open your eyes, and see who it is I love.

RONDON.

'Tis he!

FIERENFAT.

Who?

LISE.

Your brother.

Old EUPHEMON.

The same, sir.

FIERENFAT.

You are pleased to jest, sir: this scoundrel my
brother?

LISE.

Yes, sir.

M. de CROUPILLAC.

Upon my honour! I am very glad to hear it.
RON.

R O N D O N.

What wonderful metamorphosis ; why this is my droll valet.

FIERENFAT.

So, so, I play a pretty extraordinary part here : why, what brother is this ? ha !

Old EUPHEMON.

He is your brother, sir ; I had lost him ; but heaven and repentance has restor'd him to me.

M. de CROUPILLAC.

And luckily enough for me.

FIERENFAT.

The rascal is come back only to take away my wife from me.

Young EUPHEMON.

[To Fierenfat.

'Tis fit, sir, that you know me ; and let me tell you, sir, 'twas you took her from me, not I from you. In better days I had her heart : the folly of rash and unexperienc'd youth deprived me of a treasure which I did not know the value of : but on this happy day I have found again my virtue, my mistress, and my father : the rights of blood and the rights of love are at once restor'd to me, and perhaps you envy me the sudden, the unexpected blessings. But take my inheritance ; I give it you freely : you
are

THE PRODIGAL. 233

are fond of riches, and I of her : thus shall both be happy ; you in my possessions, and I in my Life's heart.

OLD EUPHEMON.

His disinterested goodness shall not be thus rewarded. No, Euphemon, thou shalt not be so unworthy of her.

RONDON.

Very good ; very fine indeed !

M. de CROUPILLAC.

For my part, I'm astonish'd, and yet not displeas'd : 'tis a comfort to me to think the gentleman is come on purpose to revenge, as it were, my charms.

[To Euphemon.

Quick, quick, sir : marry her as soon as possible ; heav'n is on your side, and to be sure made that lady on purpose for you ; you were born for each other ; and, by this lucky accident, 'tis ten to one if I don't recover my President.

LISE.

[To Rondon.

With all my heart. You, my dear father, will permit my faithful heart, which can be given but to one, to return to its right owner.

RONDON.

Why—if his brain is not quite so much turn'd and—

LISE.

LISE.

O, I'll answer for him.

RONDON.

If he loves you ; if he is prudent—

LISE.

O doubt it not.

RONDON.

And if Euphemon will give him a good fortune, why—I agree.

FIERENFAT.

To be sure I am a great gainer in this affair, by finding a new brother ; but then I lose my wedding expences, my fortune, and a wife into the bargain.

M. de CROUPILLAC.

For shame, thou sordid wretch, for ever in pursuit of riches ! have not I, in notes, bonds, and houses, enough to live upon, and more, much more, than you deserve ! Am I not your first love ! Didst thou not swear fidelity to me ? Have not I it all under your own hand ? your madrigals without sense, your songs without wit, your promises without meaning ? But we'll try it at law, sir : I'll produce them in a court of justice ; and the parliament, in such a case, I am sure, ought to make an act on purpose to punish ingratitude.

RON

RONDON.

My good friend, take care of yourself, and tremble at her resentment : let me advise you to marry, if it be only to get shut of her.

Old EUPHEMON.

[To M. de Croupillac.]

I am surpris'd at the passion you express for my son ; methinks even the suit you threaten him with must sooth his vanity ; the cause of your anger does him too much honour : but permit me to address myself to the dear object that has restor'd my son. Be united, my children, and embrace as brothers : and you, my friend, [*Turning to Rondon*] must return thanks to heav'n, whose goodness hath done all for the best. And henceforth,

Of youth misguided, let us learn, whate'er
Their follies threaten, never to despair.

END of the FIFTH and LAST ACT.

THE PROLOGUE

By J. M. W. Turner

It is a scene of nature, and of nature's beauty

And of the power of the human mind

To create a world of its own

Of light and shadow, of colour and tone

Of the great and the small, of the high and the low

Of the old and the new, of the past and the present

Of the world as it is, and of the world as it should be

Of the world as it was, and of the world as it is to be

Of the world as it is, and of the world as it is to be

Of the world as it is, and of the world as it is to be

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M E R O P E.

A

T R A G E D Y.

Represented in 1743.



W E R O P E

T A A G E T

Signature in 17th

Handwritten signature

A
L E T T E R
FROM THE
Jesuit TOURNEMINE to Father BRUMOY,
ON
The TRAGEDY of M E R O P E.

REV. FATHER,

THE *Merope* which you desired to be returned last night, I have sent you this morning at eight o'clock. I have taken time to read it with attention. Whatever success the fluctuating taste of *Paris* may think proper to bestow on it, I am satisfied, that posterity will applaud it as one of our best performances, and indeed as the model of true tragedy. *Aristotle*, the legislator of the stage, has allotted to *Merope* the first rank amongst the fine subjects for tragedy. It is treated by *Euripides*, we know, and in such a manner, as we learn from *Aristotle*, that whenever his *Cresphontes* was exhibited at *Athens*, that ingenious people, who were accustomed

customed to the finest dramatic performances, were struck, ravished, and transported, in the most extraordinary manner. If the taste of *Paris* should not correspond with that of *Athens*, we know which is to be blamed. The *Cresphontes* of *Euripides* is lost; Mr. *Voltaire* has restored it to us. You, my dear Sir, who have given us an *Euripides* in *French*, exactly as he appeared to admiring *Greece*, have acknowledged in the *Mé-
rope* of our illustrious friend, the natural, the simple, and the pathetic of *Euripides*. Mr. *Voltaire* has preserved the simplicity of the subject, has not only disencumbered it from superfluous episodes, but from many unnecessary scenes also: the danger of *Ægisthus* alone fills the stage: the interest increases from scene to scene, till we come to the catastrophe, the surprise of which is managed and prepared with the greatest art. We expect it indeed from the grand-son of *Alcides*. Every thing passes upon the stage as it did in *Mycenæ*. The theatrical strokes are not forced and unnatural; or such as, by their great degree of the marvellous, shock all probability: they arise entirely from the subject: it is the historical event represented to us in the most lively manner. It is impossible not to be deeply moved and affected by that scene where *Narbas* arrives, at the very instant
when

when *Merope* is going to sacrifice her son, on a supposition that she is about to revenge him: or by that scene, where she has no other means of saving him from inevitable death, than by discovering him to the tyrant. The fifth act equals, if not surpasses, any of those few excellent last acts, which our stage has to boast of. Every thing passes without; notwithstanding which the author has so artfully and judiciously contrived, as to bring all the action before us: the narration by *Ismenia* is not one of those studied artificial pieces, which are foreign to the subject; where the poet's wit is made to shine out of its place, such as throw an air of coldness and insipidity over the whole fable. This is nothing but action throughout. The trouble and agitation visible in *Ismenia*, are expressive of the tumult she describes *. I say nothing of the versification, which is more

* The French sentence is as follows: " Je ne parle point de la *versification*; le poete, admirable *versificateur*, s'est surpassé; " jamais sa *versification* ne fut plus belle & plus claire:" which, literally translated, would run thus: " I say nothing of the *versification*; the poet, an admirable *versifyer*, has surpassed himself; never was his *versification* so beautiful and so clear." Here we see the words *versifyer* and *versification* repeated no less than three times in three lines. An English ear is too delicate to admit of this. I have been frequently obliged to vary the turn and expression of the sentence, to avoid this repetition of the same word, which *Voltaire* himself is often guilty of, though, in general, a correct writer,

clear and beautiful, than any I remember to have seen, even in *Voltaire*, who is certainly an excellent poet: all those, in short, who feel an honest indignation at the corruption and depravity of our present taste; all who have at heart the reformation of our stage; who wish that, by a careful imitation of the *Greeks*, whom in many perfections of the drama we have surpassed, we might endeavour to obtain the true end and design of it, by making the theatre, what it might be made, the school of virtue: all those, who think thus rationally and seriously, must be pleased to see so great and celebrated a poet as *Voltaire* employing his fine talents in such a tragedy as this, without love in it.

He has not imprudently hazarded the success of so noble a design; but in the place of love has substituted sentiments of virtue, which are not less forcible. As much prejudiced as we are in favour of tragedies founded on love intrigues, it is nevertheless true, (and we have often observed it) that those tragedies, which have met with the greatest success, were not indebted to their love scenes for it: on the other hand, all our good critics allow, that romantic gallantry has disgraced and degraded our stage, and some of our best writers also. The great *Corneille* was sensible of this; he

he submitted, not without reluctance, to the reigning taste of the age; not venturing to banish love entirely, he went at least so far as to banish successful love: he would not permit it to appear weak or mean, but raised it even to heroism, choosing rather to go beyond nature, than to sink it into a too tender and contagious passion.

Thus, Rev. Father, have I sent you that judgment which your illustrious friend seemed desirous of: I wrote it in haste, which is a proof of my regard; but the paternal friendship which I have had for him, even from his infancy, hath not so far prevailed as to blind me in his favour. You will let him see what I have wrote. I have the honour to be, my dear friend, my dear son, the glory of your father, as I ever must be, sincerely your's,

Dec. 23, 1738.

TOURNEMINE.

A

L E T T E R

T O T H E

MARQUIS SCIPIO MAFFEI,

Author of the Italian *MEROPE*, and many other celebrated Performances.

SIR,

THE *Greeks* and *Romans*, to whom modern *Italy*, as well as all other nations, is indebted for almost every thing, dedicated their works, without the ridiculous form of compliments, to their friends, who are masters of the art : by this claim I take the liberty of addressing to you the *French Merope*.

The *Italians*, who have been the restorers of almost all the fine arts, and the inventors of many, were the first, who, under the auspices of *Leo* the Tenth, revived tragedy ; and you, sir, are the first who, in this age, when the *Sophoclean* art became enervated by love-intrigues, often foreign to the subject, and as often debased by idle buffooneries, that reflected dishonour
on

on the taste of your ingenious countryman; you, sir, were the first who had courage and genius enough to hazard a tragedy without gallantry, a tragedy worthy of Athens in its glory; wherein the maternal affection constitutes the whole intrigue, and the most tender interest arises from the purest virtue. *France* prides itself in her *Athaliah*: it is indeed the master-piece of our stage, perhaps of poetry itself. Of all the pieces that are exhibited amongst us, it is the only one where love is not introduced: but, at the same time, we must allow that it is supported by the pomp of religion, and that majesty of eloquence which appears in the prophets. You had not that resource, and yet you have so contrived, as to furnish out five acts, which it is so extremely difficult to fill up without episodes. I must own, your subject appeared to me much more interesting and tragical than that of *Athaliah*; and even if our admirable *Racine* had worked up his master-piece with more art, more poetry, and more sublimity than he has, your's, I am satisfied, would have drawn more tears from the audience.

The preceptor of *Alexander* (kings ought always to have such preceptors), the great *Aristotle*, that extensive genius, so just, and so deeply versed in all the learning of those times, *Aristotle*, in his *Art of Poetry*, has declared, that

the meeting of *Merope* and her son was the most interesting circumstance of the whole *Grecian* theatre. This stroke was, in his opinion, infinitely superior to all the rest. *Plutarch* tells us, that the *Greeks*, who, of all the people in the world, had the quickest feeling, trembled with fear, lest the old man, who was to stop the arm of *Merope*, should not come time enough. That piece, which was played in his time, and a few fragments of which are still extant, appeared to him the most affecting of all the tragedies of *Euripides*: but it was not the choice of his subject alone to which that poet owed his success, though, in every species of the drama, a happy choice, is, no doubt, of the greatest service.

France has seen several *Meropes*, but none of them ever succeeded: the authors perhaps overloaded this simple subject with foreign ornaments; it was the naked *Venus* of *Praxiteles* which they wanted to cover with tinsel. It requires a great deal of time to teach men, that every thing which is great should be simple and natural. In 1641, when the *French* stage began to flourish, and even to raise itself above that of *Greece*, by the genius of *P. Corneille*, *Cardinal Richelieu*, who ambitiously sought for glory of every kind, and who had just then built a magnificent hall, for
theatrical

theatrical representations, in the Palais Royal, of which he had himself furnished the design, had a *Merope* played there under the name of *Telephonte*; the plot of it is generally believed to have been entirely his own. There are about a hundred verses in it, supposed to be written by him; the rest was by *Colletet*, *Bois-Roberts*, *Démarets*, and *Chapelain*; but all the power of Cardinal *Richelieu* could not impart to those writers that genius which they never possessed: his own was not indeed adapted to the stage, though he had a good taste; so that all he could do, or that could be expected from him, was to patronise and encourage the great *Corneille*.

Mr. *Gilbert*, resident of the celebrated queen *Christiana*, in 1643, gave up his *Merope*, which is at present as little known as the other. *La Chapel'e*, of the French academy, author of a tragedy called *Cleopatra*, which was played with some success, gave us another *Merope* in 1683, and took care to insert a love episode: he complains withal in his preface, that the critics reproached him with too great a degree of the marvellous; but he was mistaken, it was not the marvellous that sunk his performance, but in reality the want of genius, added to the coldness and insipidity of his versification: this is the great

point, the capital fault, that condemns so many poems to oblivion.

The art of eloquence in verse is of all arts the most difficult and the most uncommon : there are a thousand geniusses to be found, who can plan a work, and put it into verse, after the common manner ; but to treat it like a true poet, is a talent which is seldom bestowed on above two or three men on the face of the whole earth.

In December 1701, M. de la Grange played his *Amasis*, which is nothing more than the subject of *Merope* under another name. Gallantry has its share of this performance likewise ; and there is more of the marvellous in it, even than in *la Chapelle's* : but it is more interesting, conducted with more art and genius, and written with more warmth and power ; notwithstanding which, it met with no great success ;

Et habent sua fata libelli.

Since that, however, it has been revived with great applause ; and is one of those few pieces which generally gives pleasure in the representation.

Before and after *Amasis* we have had several tragedies, on subjects very nearly resembling this, wherein a mother is going to revenge the death of

of her son on the son himself, and discovers him just at the instant when she was about to kill him. We frequently saw on our stage that striking but rarely probable situation, wherein a person comes with a poignard in his hand ready to destroy his enemy, and another arrives at the same instant, and snatches it from him. This incident recommended, at least for a time, the *Comma* of *Thomas Corneille*.

But amongst all the tragedies on this subject, which I have here enumerated, there is not one of them but what is filled with some episode of love, or rather gallantry; for every thing must give way to the reigning taste. But you must not believe, sir, that this unhappy custom of loading our tragedies with ridiculous love intrigues was owing to *Racine*; a crime, which, in *Italy*, I know he is generally reproached with: on the contrary, he did every thing in his power to reform the public taste in this particular: the passion of love is never brought in by him as a mere episode; it is the foundation or ground-plot of all pieces, and forms the principal interest: it is certainly of all his passions the most truly theatrical, the most fruitful in sentiments, and admits of the greatest variety: it ought, therefore, no doubt, to be the soul of a dramatic performance,

formance, or entirely to be banished from it: if love is not tragical, it is insipid; and when it is tragical, it should reign alone; it was never made for a second place. It was *Rotrou*, or rather we must own the great *Corneille* himself, who, in his creation of the stage, at the same time disfigured and disgraced it, by those ridiculous intrigues, bespoken as it were, and made on purpose; those affairs of gallantry, which not being true passions, were unworthy of the stage: if you would know *the reason* why *Corneille's* tragedies are so seldom played, the reason is plain enough: it is because, in his *Otho*,

“ *Otho* makes a compliment to his mistress
 “ more like a man of wit than a real lover: he
 “ follows step by step the effort of his memory,
 “ which it is much more easy to admire than to
 “ believe. *Camilla* herself seemed to be of this
 “ opinion; she would have liked much better a
 “ discourse less studied.—Tell me then, when
 “ *Otho* made love to *Camilla*, was he contented,
 “ or was she kind?”

It is because, in *Pompey*, *Cleopatra* (a useless character) says that *Cæsar*

“ Sighs for her, and in a plaintive style calls
 “ himself her captive, even in the field of vic-
 “ tory.”

It

It is because *Cæsar* asks *Antony*, “ If he has
 “ seen this adorable queen :” to which *Antony* re-
 plies,* “ Yes, my lord, I have seen her, she is in-
 “ comparable.”

It is because in *Sertorius*, old *Sertorius* falls
 in love, not only because he loves the lady, but
 with a political view, and cries out,

“ I love ; but it suits my age so ill to be in
 “ love, that I even conceal it from the fair one
 “ who has charmed me. As I know that the
 “ deep and yellow wrinkles on my forehead can
 “ have no great power in captivating the senses.”

It is because, in *Oedipus*, *Theseus* begins by
 saying to *Dirce*, “ Whatever dreadful havock the
 “ plague may make here, absence to true lovers
 “ is far more dreadful.”

In a word, it is because such love as this will
 never make us shed tears ; and when that passion
 does not affect us, it must be quite insipid.

I have said no more here, sir, than what all
 good judges, and men of taste, say to one an-

* The French is,

Oui, Seigneur, je lai vûe, elle est incomparable.

Conversation of this kind, as *Voltaire* intimates, is much too
 low and familiar for the dignity of tragedy: but its being laboured
 into verse at the same time, doubtless makes it still more ridicu-
 lous: One would scarce indeed have imagined, that the boast-
 ed *Corneille* could ever have written such contemptible stuff &
 the lines here quoted.

other every day; what you have often heard at my house; in short, what every body thinks, but none dare to publish: you know well enough the nature of mankind; half the world write in opposition to their own opinions, for fear of shocking received prejudices and vulgar errors. With regard to myself, who have never mixed any political reserve with my sentiments on literature, I speak the truth boldly, and will add, that I respect *Corneille* more, and have a higher opinion of the real merit of this great father of the stage, than those who praise him indiscriminately, and are blind to all his faults.

* A *Merope* was exhibited at London in 1731: who would have thought a love intrigue should ever have been thought of at that time? But ever since the reign of *Charles II.* love has taken possession of the English stage; though there is not a nation upon earth by whom that passion is so ill painted; but the intrigue so absurdly brought in, and so badly treated, is the least

* Notwithstanding what Mr. *Voltaire* has here asserted, concerning an *English Merope*, acted at London in 1731, I cannot, by all the enquiry I have made amongst persons concerned in the theatres at that time, discover that any such tragedy was ever exhibited, and imagine it must therefore have been a mistake of Mr. *Voltaire's*, whose veracity in cases of this nature, is not always to be depended on.

fault of the *English Merope*. The young *Ægisthus*, delivered out of prison by a maid of honour, who is in love with him, is brought before the queen, who presents him with a bowl of poison, and a dagger, and speaks thus to him: "If you don't swallow the poison, this dagger shall put an end to your mistress's life." The young man drinks the poison, and is carried off in the agonies of death: he comes back in the fifth act, coldly to inform *Merope* that he is her son, and that he has slain the tyrant. *Merope* asks him how this miracle was performed: to which he replies, that a friend of the maid of honour had put poppy-water, instead of poison, into the cup. "I was only asleep (says he) when they thought me dead; I learn'd, when I awoke, that I was your son, and immediately kill'd the tyrant." Thus ends the tragedy; no doubt but it met with a bad reception: but is it not strange that it should ever have been represented? Is it not a proof that the *English* stage is not yet refin'd? It seems as if the same cause that deprives the *English* of any excellency in, or genius for music or painting, takes from them also all perfection in tragedy. This island, which has produced the finest philosophers in the world, is not equally

productive of the fine arts ; and if the * *English* do not seriously apply themselves to the study of those precepts which were given them by their excellent countrymen, *Addison* and *Pope*, they will never come near to other nations in point of taste and literature.

But whilst the subject of *Merope* has been thus disgraced and disfigured in one part of *Europe*, it has met with better fate in *Italy*; where it has for a long time been treated in the true taste of the ancients. In the sixteenth century, which will be famous throughout all ages, the count de *Torelli* gave us his *Merope* with choruses. If in *la Chapelle's* tragedy we find all the faults of the *French* stage, such as useless intrigues, episodes, and a romantic air ; and in the *English* author the highest degree of indecency, barbarism, and absurdity ; we likewise meet in

* Poor *England* ! deprived in one short sentence of all taste and genius for music, painting and dramatic poetry ; an island of savages and barbarians : could one have expected a censure so cruel and unjust from a writer of so much merit as *Voltaire* ? A few lines before he had told us, that there is not a nation upon earth wherein love is so ill painted as by the *English* writers. Did Mr. *Voltaire* never hear of such persons as *Rowe*, *Otway*, or *Southern* ? But such is the force of prejudice, that nothing can get the better of it ; and yet this inconsistent censurer (for such we must esteem him,) can boast in the very next page, that his love to his own country has never shut his eyes against the merit of foreigners.

—Nemo fuit unquam
Tam dispar sibi—

the

the *Italian* with all the faults of the *Greek* theatre, such as the want of action, and declamation. You, sir, have avoided all the rocks which they split upon; you, who have done honour to your country, by complete models of more than one kind, you have given us in your *Merope* an example of a tragedy that is at once both simple and interesting.

The moment I read, I was struck with it; my love to my own country hath never shut my eyes against the merit of foreigners. On the other hand, the more regard I have for, the more I endeavour to enrich it, by the addition of treasures that are not of its own growth. The desire which I had of translating your *Merope*, was increased by the honour of a personal acquaintance with you at *Paris*, in the year 1733. By loving the author, I became still more enamoured of his work; but when I sat down to it, I found it was impossible to bring it on the *French* stage. We are grown excessively delicate: like the *Sybarites* of old, we are so immersed in luxury, that we cannot bear that rustic simplicity, and that description of a country life, which you have imitated from the *Greek* theatre. I am afraid our audiences would not suffer young *Ægisthus* to make a present of his
ring

ring to the man that stops him. I could not have ventured to seize upon a hero, and take him for a robber; though, at the same time, the circumstances he is in authorises the mistake. Our manners, which probably admit of many things which your's do not, would not permit us to represent the tyrant, the murdurer of *Merope's* husband and children, pretending, after fifteen years, to be in love with her; nor could I even have dared to make the queen say to him, *Why did not you talk to me of love before, when the bloom of youth was yet on my face?* Conversations of this kind are natural; but our pit, which at some times is so indulgent, and at others so nice and delicate, would think them perhaps too familiar, and might even discover coquetry, where, in reality, there might be nothing but what is just and proper. Our stage would have by no means have suffered *Merope* to bind her son to a pillar, nor to run after him with a javelin, and an axe in her hand, nor have permitted the young man to run away from her twice, and beg his life of the tyrant: much less could we have suffered the confidante of *Merope* to have persuaded *Ægisthus* to go to sleep on the stage, merely to give the queen an opportunity of coming there to assassinate him; not but all this is natural; but you must

must pardon us for expecting that nature should always be presented to us with some strokes of art; strokes that are extremely different at *Paris* from those which we meet with at *Verona*.

To give you a proper idea of the different taste and judgment of polite and cultivated nations, with regard to the same arts, permit me here to quote a few passages from your own celebrated performance, which seem dictated by pure nature. The person who stops young *Cressphontes*, and takes the ring from him, says,

Or dunque in tuo paese i servi
Han di coteste gemme? un bel paese
Sia questo tuo; nel nostro una tal gemma
Ad un dito real non sconverebbe.

I will take the liberty to translate this into blank verse, in which your tragedy is written, as I have no time at present to work it into rhyme,

Have slaves such precious jewels where thou liv'st?
Sure 'tis a noble country; for, with us,
Such rings might well adorn a royal hand.

The tyrant's confidante tells him, when speaking of the queen, who refuses, after twenty years, to marry the known murderer of her family:

La Donna, come sai, ricusa e brama.

Women, we know, refuse when most they love.

The

The queen's waiting woman answers the tyrant, who presses her to use her influence in his favour, thus :

—diffimulato in vano

Soffre di febre assalto : alquanti giorni
Donare è forza a rinfrancar suoi spiriti.

The queen, sir, has a fever, 'tis in vain
To hide it, and her spirits are oppress'd ;
She must have time to recollect them.

In your fourth act, old *Polydore* asks one of *Me-
rope's* courtiers who he is ? to which he replies,
I am *Eurises*, the son of *Nicander* ; *Polydore* then,
speaking of *Nicander*, talks in the style of *Ho-
mer's Nestor*.

Egli era humano

E liberal, quando appariva, tutti
Faceangli honor ; io mi ricordo ancora
Diquanto ei festeggiò con bella pompa :
Le sue nozze con *Silvia*, ch'era figlia
D'*Olimpia* e di *Glicon* fratel d'*Ipparcho*.
Tu dunque sir quell fanciullin che in corte
Silvia condur solea quasi per pompa :
Parmi' l'altir hieri : O quanto siete presti,
Quanto voi v' affrettate, O giovinetti,
A farvi adulti ed à gridar tacendo
Che noi diam loco !

The

The most humane, most gen'rous of mankind,
Where'er he went, respected and belov'd :
O I remember well the feast he gave
When to his *Sylvia* wedded, the fair daughter
Of *Glycon*, brother of the brave *Hipparchus*,
And chaste *Olympia* : and art thou that infant
Whom *Sylvia* to the court so often brought,
And fondly in her arms ? alas ! methinks
It was but yesterday : how quickly youth
Shoots up, and tells us we must quit the scene !

In another place the same old man, being invited to the ceremony of the queen's marriage, says :

Oh curioso

Punto io non son, passò stagione. Assai
Veduti ho sacrificii ; io mi ricordo
Di quello ancora quando il rè *Cresphonte*
Incomincio à regnar. Quella fù pompa,
Ora più non si fanno a questi tempti
Di cotai sacrificii. Più di cento
Fur le bestie sivenate i sacerdoti
Risplendean tutti, ed ove ti volgeffi
Altro non si vedea che argento ed oro.

My time is past, and curiosity
Is now no more . already I have seen

Enough

Enough of nuptial rites, enough of pomp
 And sacrifice : I still remember well
 The great solēmnity, when king *Cresphontes*
 Began his reign : O 'twas a noble fight !
 We cannot boast of such in these our days :
 A hundred beasts are offer'd up, the priests
 In all their splendor shone, and nought was seen
 But gold and silver.—

All these strokes are natural, all agreeable to the characters and manners represented : such familiar dialogues would, no doubt, have been well received at *Athens* ; but *Paris* and our pit expect a simplicity of another kind. We may, perhaps, even boast of a more refined taste than *Athens* itself, where, though the principal city of all *Greece*, it does not appear to me that they ever represented any theatrical pieces except on the four solemn festivals ; whereas at *Paris* there is always more than one every day in the year. At *Athens* the number of the citizens was computed at only ten thousand, and *Paris* has near eight hundred thousand inhabitants : amongst whom, I suppose, we may reckon thirty thousand judges of dramatic performances, and who really do pass their judgments almost every day of their lives.

In

In your tragedy you took the liberty to translate that elegant and simple comparison from Virgil.

Qualis populeâ mærens Philomela sub umbra
Amisſos queritur fætus, &c.

But if I were to take the ſame in mine, they would ſay, it was fitter for an epic poem : ſuch a rigid maſter have we to pleaſe in what we call the public :

Nescis, heu ! nescis noſtra faſtidia Romæ ;
Et pueri naſum Rhinocerontis habent.

The *Engliſh* have a cuſtom of finiſhing almoſt all their acts with a ſimile ; but we expect that, in a tragedy, the hero ſhould talk, and not a poet. Our audience is of opinion, that in an important criſis of affairs, in a council, in a violent paſſion, or a preſſing danger, princes and miniſters ſhould never make poetical comparisons.

How could I ever venture to make the under characters talk together for a long time ? With you, thoſe converſations ſerve to prepare intereſting ſcenes between the principal actors : they are like the avenues to a fine palace ; but our ſpectators are for coming into it at once. We
muſt

must therefore comply with the national taste, which is, perhaps, grown more difficult from having been cloyed, as it were, with such a variety of fine performances: and yet amongst these recitals, which our excessive severity condemns, how many beauties do I regret the loss of! How does simple nature delight me, though beneath a form that appears strange to us!

I have here, sir, given you some of those reasons which prevailed on me not to follow what I so much admired. I was obliged, not without regret, to write a new *Merope*: I have done it in a different manner, but I am far from thinking that I have therefore done it better. I look upon myself, with regard to you, as a traveller to whom an eastern monarch had made a present of some very rich stuffs: the king would certainly permit this traveller to wear them according to the fashion of his own country.

My *Merope* was finished in the beginning of the year 1736, pretty nearly as it now stands; studies of another kind prevented me from bringing it on the stage: but what weighed most with me was, the hazard which I ran in producing it, after several successful pieces on almost the same subject, though under different names. at length, however, I ventured to produce it,
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and the public gave me a convincing proof, that they could condescend to see the same matter worked up in a different manner. That happened to our stage which we see every day in a gallery of pictures, where there are many of them on exactly the same subject. The judges are pleased by the observation of these different manners, and every one marks down and enjoys, according to his own taste, the character of every painter. This is a kind of happy concurrence, which, at the same time that it contribute towards the perfection of the art, gives the public a better insight into it. If the *French Merope* has met with the same success as the *Italian*, it is to you, sir, I am indebted for it; to that simplicity in your performance which I have taken for my model, and which I was always an admirer of. Though I walked in a different path, you were always my guide. I could have wished, after the examples of the *Italians* and *English*, to employ the happy facility of blank verse, and have often called to mind this passage of *Rucellai*:

Tu fai purche l' imagine della voce
 Che risponde da i sassi, dove l'echo alberga,
 Sempre nemica seu del nostro regno,
 E fù inventrice delle prime rime.

But

But I am satisfied, as I have long since declared, that such an attempt would never succeed in *France*, and it would be rather a mark of weakness than good sense, to endeavour to shake off a yoke which so many authors have born, whose works will last as long as the nation itself. Our poetry has none of those liberties which yours has; and this is perhaps one of the reasons why the *Italians* got the start of us, by three or four centuries, in this most difficult and most delightful art.

As I have endeavoured to imitate you in tragedy, I should be glad to follow your example in other branches of literature, for which you are so eminently distinguished: I could wish to form my taste by your's in the science of history; I do not mean the empty barren knowlege of dates and facts; that only informs us at what period of time a man died, who perhaps was a useless or pernicious member of society; the science of a dictionary, that loads the memory without improving the mind: I mean that history of the human heart which teaches us men and manners, which leads us from error to error, and from prejudice to prejudice, into the effects of the various passions and affections that agitate mankind: which shews us all the evils that ignorance, or knowlege misapplied, have produced

duced in the world: and which, above all, gives us a clue to the progress of the arts, and follows them through the dangers of so many contending powers, and the ruin of so many empires.

It is this which makes history delightful; and it becomes still more so to me, by the place which you will possess amongst those who have pleased and instructed mankind. It will raise the emulation of posterity, to hear that your country has bestowed on you the most signal honours; that *Verona* has raised a statue, with this inscription, TO THE MARQUIS SCIPIO MAFFEI IN HIS LIFE TIME. An inscription as beautiful in its kind as that at Montpellier to Lewis XIV. *after his death.*

Deign, sir, to accept, with the respects of your fellow-citizens, those of a stranger, who esteems and honours you as much as if he had been born at *Verona*.

A L E T-

A
L E T T E R

F R O M

Mr. DE LA LINDELLE to Mr. DE VOLTAIRE.

S I R,

YOU had the politeness to dedicate your tragedy of *Merope* to Mr. *Maffei*, and have served the cause of literature both in *Italy* and *France*, by pointing out, from the perfect knowledge which you have of the theatre, the different rules and conduct of the *Italian* and *French* stages. The partial attachment which you have to every thing that comes from *Italy*, added to your particular regard for Mr. *Maffei*, would not permit you to censure the real faults of that excellent writer; but as I have myself nothing in view but truth, and the advancement of the arts, I shall not be afraid to speak the sentiments of the judicious public, and which I am satisfied must be your's also.

The Abbé *Desfontaines* had already remarked some palpable errors in the *Merope* of Mr. *Maffei*: but, according to his usual manner, with more rudeness than justice:

justice: he has mingled a few good criticisms with many bad ones. This satirist, so universally decried, had neither knowledge enough of the *Italian* tongue, nor taste enough to form an equitable judgment.

This then is the opinion of the most judicious, amongst those literati whom I have consulted, both in *France* and on the other side of the *Alps*. *Merope* appears to every one of them, past dispute, the most interesting and truly tragic subject that was ever brought on the stage, infinitely beyond that of *Athaliah*; because *Athaliah* does not want to assassinate the young king, but is deceived by the high-priest, who seeks revenge on her for her former crimes: whereas in *Merope* we see a mother, who, in revenging her son, is on the point of murdering that very son himself, her only desire, and her only hope: the interest of *Merope* therefore affects us in a very different manner from that of *Athaliah*: but it seems as if Mr. *Maffei* was satisfied with what the subject naturally suggested to him, without making use of any theatrical art in the conduct of it.

1. The scenes, in many places, are not linked together, and the stage is left void; a fault which, in the present age, is looked upon as unpardonable, even in the lowest class of dramatic writers.

2. The actors frequently come in and go out without reason ; a fault no less considerable.

3. There is no probability, no dignity, no decorum, no art in the dialogue : in the very first scene we see a tyrant reasoning in the calmest manner with *Merope*, whose husband and children he had murdered, and making love to her : this would have been hissed at *Paris*, even by the poorest judges.

4. Whilst the tyrant is thus ridiculously making love to the old queen, word is brought, that they have found a young man who had committed murder ; but it does not appear through the whole course of the play who it was he had killed : he pretends it was a thief who wanted to steal his cloaths. How low, little, and poor, is this ? it would not be borne in a farce at a country fair.

5. The captain of the guard, provost, or whatever you call him, examines the murderer, who has a fine ring upon his finger : this scene is quite low comedy, and the style is agreeable to it, and worthy of the scene.

6. The mother immediately supposes that the robber, who was killed, is her son. It is pardonable, no doubt, in a mother to fear every thing ; but a queen, who is a mother, should have required better proofs.

7. In

7. In the midst of all those fears, the tyrant *Poliphontes* reasons with *Merope's* waiting-woman about his pretended passion. These cold and indecent scenes, which are only brought in to fill up the act, would never be suffered on a regular stage. You have only, sir, modestly taken notice of one of these scenes, where *Merope's* woman desires the tyrant not to hasten the nuptials; because, she says, her mistress has *an attack of a fever*: but I, sir, will boldly aver, in the name of all the critics. that such a conversation, and such an answer, are only fit for *Harlequin's* theatre.

8. I will add, moreover, that when the queen, imagining her son to be dead, tells us she longs to pull the heart out of the murderer's breast, and tear it with her teeth, she talks more like a *Cannibal* than an afflicted mother; and that decency should be preserved in every thing.

9. *Ægisthus*, who was brought in as a robber, and who had said that he had himself been attacked, is taken for a thief a second time, and carried before the queen, in spite of the king, who, notwithstanding, undertakes to defend him. The queen binds him to a pillar, is going to kill him with a dart; but before she throws it, asks him some questions. *Ægisthus* tells her, that his father is an old man, upon

which the queen immediately relents. Is not this an excellent reason for changing her mind, and imagining that *Ægisthus* might be her own son? a most indisputable mark to be sure: is it so very extraordinary that a young man should have an old father? *Maffei* has added this absurdity, this deficiency of art and genius, to another even more ridiculous, which he had made in his first edition. *Ægisthus* says to the queen, "O *Polydore*, my father." This *Polydore* was the very man to whom *Merope* had entrusted the care of *Ægisthus*. At hearing the name of *Polydore*, the queen could no longer doubt that *Ægisthus* was her son, thus the piece was entirely at an end. This error was removed; but removed, we see, only to make room for a greater.

10. Whilst the queen is thus ridiculously, and without any reason, in suspense, occasioned by the mention of an old man, the tyrant comes in, and takes *Ægisthus* under his protection. The young man, who should have been represented as a hero, thanks the king for his life, with a base and mean submission that is disgusting, and entirely degrades the character of *Ægisthus*.

11. At length *Merope* and the tyrant are left together: *Merope* exhausts her resentment in reproaches without end. Nothing can be more cold

cold and lifeless than these scenes, full of declamation, that have no plot, interest, or contrasted passion in them ; they are school-boys scenes : every thing in a play, that is without action, is useless.

12. There is so little art in this piece, that the author is always forced to employ confidants to fill up the stage. The fourth act begins with another cold and useless scene between the tyrant and the queen's waiting-woman ; who, a little afterwards, lights, we know not how, on young *Ægisthus*, and persuades him to rest himself in the porch, merely to give the queen a fair opportunity of dispatching him when he falls asleep ; which he does according to promise. An excellent plot this ! and then the queen comes a second time, with an axe in her hand, in order to kill the young man, who is gone to sleep for that purpose. This circumstance, twice repeated, is surely the height of barrenness, as the young man's sleep is the height of ridicule. Mr. *Maffei* thinks there is genius and variety in this repetition, because the queen comes in the first time with a dart, and the second with an axe. What a strange effect of fancy !

13. At last old *Polydore* comes in *à propos*, and prevents the queen from striking the blow. One would naturally imagine, that this hap-

py instant must produce a thousand affecting incidents between the mother and son ; but we meet with nothing of this kind : *Ægisthus* flies off, and sees no more of his mother : he has not so much as one scene with her. This betrays a want of genius that is insupportable. *Merope* asks the old man what recompence he demands ; and the old fool begs her to make him young again. In this manner the queen employs her time, which, doubtless, she should have spent in running after her son : all this is low, ill-placed, and ridiculous to the last degree.

14. In the course of this piece the tyrant is always for espousing *Merope* ; and, to compass his end, he bids her agents tell her, that he will murder all her servants, if she does not consent to give him her hand. What a ridiculous idea, and how extravagant a tyrant ! Could not Mr. *Maffei* have found out a more specious pretext to save the honour of a queen, who had meanness enough to marry the murderer of her whole family ?

15. Another childish college trick : the tyrant says to his confident, “ I know the art
 “ of reigning ; I’ll put the bold and rebellious
 “ to death ; give the reins to all kind of vice ;
 “ invite my subjects to commit the most atroc-
 “ ious crimes, and pardon the most guilty ;
 “ expose

“ expose the good to the fury of the wicked,
 “ &c.” Did ever man pronounce such vile
 stuff? This declaration of a *regent of sixteen*,
 doth it not give us a fine idea of a man who
 knows how to govern? *Racine* was condemn-
 ed for having made *Mathan* (in his *Athaliah*)
 say too much against himself; and yet *Mathan*
 talks reasonably: but here it is to the last de-
 gree absurd to pretend, that throwing every
 thing into confusion is the art of ruling well;
 it is rather the art of dethroning himself. One
 cannot read any thing so ridiculous without
 laughing at it. Mr. *Maffei* is a strange po-
 litician.

In a word, sir, this work of *Maffei* is a
 fine subject, but a very bad performance. E-
 very body at *Paris* agrees, that it would not
 go through one representation; and the sen-
 sible men in *Italy* have a very poor opinion of
 it. It is in vain the author has taken so much
 pains in his travels, to engage the worst wri-
 ters he could pick up to translate his tragedy:
 it was much easier for him to pay a translator,
 than to make his piece a good one.

THE
A N S W E R
O F

Mr. de VOLTAIRE to Mr. de la LINDELLE.

SIR,

THE letter which you did me the honour to write to me entitles you to the name of *Hypercritic*, which was given to the famous *Scaliger*: you are truly a most redoubtable adversary: if you treat Mr. *Maffei* in this manner, what am I to expect from you? I acknowledge that, in many points, you have too much reason on your side. You have taken a great deal of pains to rake together a heap of brambles and briars; but why would you not enjoy the pleasure of gathering a few flowers? there are certainly many in Mr. *Maffei*; and which, I dare affirm, will flourish for ever. Such are the scenes between the mother and son, and the narration of the catastrophe. I can not help thinking, that these strokes are affecting and pathetic. You say, the subject alone makes all the beauty; but was it not the

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the same subject in other authors who have treated *Merope*? Why, with the same assistance, had they not the same success? does not this single argument prove, that Mr. *Maffei* owes as much to his genius as to his subject?

To be plain with you, I think Mr. *Maffei* has shewn more art than myself, in the manner by which he has contrived to make *Merope* think that her son is the murderer of her son. I could not bring myself to make use of the ring as he did; because, after *the royal ring* that *Boillieu* laughs at in his Satires, this circumstance would always appear too trifling on our stage. We must conform to the fashions of our own age and nation; and, for the same reason, we ought not lightly to condemn those of foreigners.

Neither Mr. *Maffei* nor I have sufficiently explained the motives that should so strongly incline *Poliphontes* to espouse the queen. This is, perhaps, a fault inherent in the subject; but I must own I think this fault very inconsiderable, when the circumstances it produces are so interesting. The grand point is to affect and draw tears from the spectators. Tears were shed both at *Verona* and at *Paris*. This is the best answer that can be made to the critics. It is impossible to be perfect; but how meritorious is it to move an audience, in spite
of

of all our imperfections! Most certain it is, that in *Italy* many things are passed over, which would not be pardoned in *France*: first, because taste, decorum, and the stage itself, is not the same in both; secondly, because the *Italians*, having no city where they represent dramatic pieces every day, cannot possibly be so used to things of this kind as ourselves. *Opera*, that splendid monster, has drove out *Melpomene* from among them; and there are so many of the *Castrati* there, that no room is left for *Roscus* and *Æsopus*: but if ever the *Italians*, should have a regular theatre, I believe they would soon get beyond us: their stages are more extensive, their language more tractable, their blank verses easier to be made, their nation possessed of more sensibility; but they want encouragement, peace, plenty, &c.



END of the THIRD VOLUME.

